
MALTA
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
REVIEW

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Archaeological Society is made up of members with a genuine interest in archaeology in general and that of the Maltese Islands in particular. Anyone with such an interest, whether a professional archaeologist or not, is welcome to join.

The Society is concerned with all matters pertaining to archaeology. One of its principal objectives is to promote and enhance the study of archaeology at all levels. It is not a pressure group. It believes that it is only when there is a sufficient interest in, and understanding of, our archaeological heritage among the public at large, that this priceless heritage can be protected and preserved.

The Society organises meetings and seminars, some of which are open to the public, as well as site visits both in the Maltese Islands and abroad. It publishes the Malta Archaeological Review. It endeavours to maintain close relations with the Museums Department and the Department of Classics and Archaeology of the University of Malta and to support the activities of both. It also maintains a network of relations with archaeological societies and organisations abroad.

The Malta Archaeological Review welcomes the submission of papers on the subjects mentioned above. Contributors are requested to keep papers to a maximum of 2000 words but may also submit two or three illustrations. The editors reserve the right to limit the reproduction of illustrations, which are not an integral part of the text, according to availability of space.

Official Address

**The President
The Archaeological Society
c/o The National Museum of Archaeology
Auberge de Provence
Republic Street
Valletta
MALTA**

Application for membership and all correspondence should be addressed to:

**The Honorary Secretary
Flat 8, 14A Ghar il-Lenbi Street,
Sliema SLM16
MALTA**

email: archaeologysociety@mail.global.net.mt

Edited by Patricia Camilleri (email: pcam1@um.edu.mt)

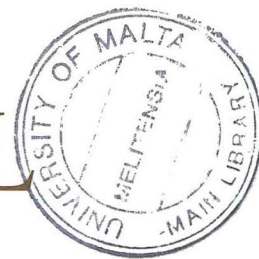
© The Archaeological Society 2001


Printed in Malta by Publishers Enterprises Group (PEG) Ltd

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Patron: The President of the Republic of Malta
President: Professor A.H.B. de Bono
Vice Presidents: Mr Anthony Pace, Dr Anthony Frendo
Honorary Secretary: Ms Kathryn Caruana Montaldo
Honorary Treasurer: Vacant

MALTA ARCHAEOLOGICAL REVIEW





U
N
I
V
E
R
S
I
T
Y

O
F
M
A
L
T
A

LIBRARY


Main Library

Class Mark MZG

No. of Volumes

Remarks

REFERENCE
ONLY



436963

From the President

Antony de Bono..... 1

Albert Mayr (1868 - 1924)

Hanna Stöger..... 3

Għajn Klieb

Nicholas C. Vella et al...... 10

Castellu di la Chitati

Stephen C. Spiteri..... 17

Pasti Rituali nella Malta Punica

Alessandro Quercia..... 28

Carapecchia's intervention at the Inquisitor's Palace 1733 - 34

Kenneth Gambin..... 34

A Historical Complex at St. Agatha - Rabat

Fr. Victor J. Camilleri MSSP..... 40

National Museum of Archaeology News

C. Michelle Buhagiar..... 44

Scavi e Ricerche della

Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta

Antonia Ciasca & Maria Pia Rossignani..... 51

Antonia CIASCA (1930 – 2001)

an appreciation

News of the demise of Professor Antonia Ciasca, at the age of 70, reached us on Thursday morning the 1st of March. Professor Ciasca passed away at her family home in Rome during the previous night. The renowned and well loved scholar of Phoenician and Punic archaeology passed away after struggling for more than a year against an unforgiving illness. Immediately, a network of friends, colleagues and scholars from as far a field as Milan, Rome, Calabria, Puglia and Malta was set in motion. Although her impending departure was common knowledge, Antonia Ciasca's death still saddened many who knew her well.

The daughter of a well known anti-fascist intellectual, Antonia Ciasca had from her earliest university studies shown a keen interest in the influence of oriental cultures on the formation of the ancient European and Mediterranean world. Her early interest in Etruscan culture and Egyptology - nurtured under the tuition of great masters such as Massimo Pallottino - soon evolved into what was to become her main area of study for the rest of her life, namely the study of Phoenician archaeology.

Antonia Ciasca's expertise as a world authority on Phoenician culture and archaeology was gained in the course of an eventful career that included the direction of highly important excavations at Carthage in Tunisia, at the Phoenician city of Motia (Sicily) as well as in the eastern Mediterranean. Her profound knowledge of the Phoenician material culture - as well as of Early Greek and Etruscan materials - was proverbial and nothing short of uncanny. Her work earned her international recognition as well as a prestigious lectureship at the Università La Sapienza of Rome, where she took over the direction of the *Istituto di Studii Fenicii* following in the footsteps of Sabatino Moscati, the founder of that institute.

In Malta, Antonia Ciasca is synonymous with the excavations of the Phoenician sanctuary of Astarte, at Tas-Silġ and the other important work of the *Missione Archeologica Italiana* at San Pawl Milqi. Tas-Silġ was, however, the project she most dearly cherished throughout her long career. The spectacular results obtained by these excavations merited her untiring dedication. In fact, at Tas-Silġ, the Italian Archaeological Mission managed to positively identify the only known remains of a 'great' Phoenician international sanctuary.

Tas-Silġ is unique. We read of the existence of only a hand-full of such fabulously influential sanctuaries in the works of the ancient Greek and Roman writers. In the same league as these renowned centres of civilization, Tas-Silġ represents that rare instance where history, ancient literature and archaeology come together. The volumes of excavation results published by the *Missione* between 1964 and 1971 on Tas-Silġ - towards which Antonia Ciasca contributed profusely - are among the most precious

documents available to date for the study of Maltese classical archaeology. These seminal works, as well as a string of subsequent publications, make Tas-Silġ Malta's most heavily published site and has earned a key place for these Islands in the world of Ancient Mediterranean studies.

However, Professor Ciasca's interest in Malta transcended the purely scientific appreciation of the heritage of these Islands. Her co-ordination of the excavations at Tas-Silġ represented her first great achievement in the field of Phoenician archaeology. For Antonia, Malta became an 'intellectual home away from home'. Even in years in which she was fully involved on other projects, she unfailingly returned to Malta year after year to develop her studies on the finds made at Tas-Silġ. This devotion to Tas-Silġ was finally rewarded during the early 1990s when she succeeded in pooling together the resources of three Italian Universities to launch a second major heritage project at the monument. Together with the Museums Department, Antonia Ciasca insisted that the new campaign should focus on the re-evaluation of the results obtained during the 1960s and the start of a conservation project at this venerable site. The last twelve months of her life, were certainly a good measure of her touching dedication to the welfare of Maltese archaeology. In spite of her illness, Antonia travelled untiringly back and forth between Rome and Tas-Silġ to keep up with her conflicting need for hospital care and her concern about the manner in which the conservation project at Tas-Silġ was proceeding.

As if this were not enough, Antonia also mobilized research funds for San Pawl Milqi, that other important monument from Malta's classical antiquity. Antonia Ciasca's great human and scientific merits may not have been widely appreciated by the general public. Her shy and retiring nature ensured that her work could be carried out in the greatest privacy and away from public recognition. Yet it was undoubtedly a labour of love that took up a great part of her highly distinguished scientific career. To Malta her work represents a selfless donation of a lifetime of profound thought and study of our heritage.

Her absence will undoubtedly be felt. It is, however, heartening to note that the scientific programmes she devised for Tas-Silġ - which involve close collaboration between Maltese and Italian archaeology professionals - seems set to live on and prosper. This must undoubtedly be the best monument to her cherished memory amongst us.

The Museums Department pays tribute to Antonia Ciasca and her work.

Anthony Pace
Director - Museums Department

From the President

Antony de Bono

There is no doubt that public interest in archaeology has increased in the past few years. This has been greatly helped by new blood at the Museums Department and the recent University graduates, as well as by the activities of a number of NGOs with an interest in archaeology. At long last plans are in hand to protect the unique neolithic temple sites from the weather. However the concern remains that much development in such a rich archaeological ambience will inevitably destroy irreplaceable parts of our heritage. This was recently illustrated by archaeological finds in a relatively shallow trench in the old capital, Mdina, which highlights once again the classic problem of any ground work in a site that may well have been occupied for six to seven millennia. There remains the classic dilemma, of how to protect the irreplaceable remnants of the past without blocking essential development for the future. Another example of this, in a different context, occurs in neighbouring Gozo, where the environment of unique Neolithic Gigantija Temple complex was threatened by the development of a nearby sports facility.

The new Mdina finds range from part of a fluted Roman column to medieval pottery are indicative of what lies beneath the present day surface. Previous random finds, in similar circumstances, have included part of a marble architrave that might well have graced the façade of a Roman temple. However, the very restricted access precludes any assessment of whether these remains are *in situ* or have been moved from elsewhere. Much earlier, there is the famous find of the buried urn full of gold Byzantine coins that contributed to the reconstruction of the Cathedral. Were these, in fact, part of the much earlier Byzantine plot to destabilise the then Angevin government at the time of the *Sicilian Vespers* uprising?

Mdina's strategic position, at the northern end of a steep escarpment that dominates the surrounding plain, is linked to the ancient haven in the inner recesses of the Grand Harbour by the natural corridor of Wied il-Kbir and has clearly been a chora from earliest times. The article by Stephen Spiteri is a fascinating account of some of the re-alignments of the defences of the fortified city from medieval times. Of particular interest is the description of the "fasil" or intervallum that protected at least the landward side in the same way as in another ancient fortress, that of Methoni (Modon) not far from Malta, a fortress originating in the Bronze Age on a headland in the Peloponese, is protected on its landward side. Another ancient Mediterranean city, Lipari, in the Aeolian Islands, has similarly been occupied since

Neolithic times, and excavations show the serried remains of millennia.

Tas-Silg is undoubtedly one of the most important archaeological sites in Malta. An account in this number of the Review, of excavations there and at other sites in Malta and Gozo, by the *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta* since 1963, summarises a re-assessment by Antonia Casca and Maria Pia Rossignani. The Tas-Silg site shows a remarkable continuum of use as a sacred place from at least the Bronze Age to the Byzantine eras. This immensely interesting site is still cut in two by a road that has been scheduled for re-routing for many years; it is difficult to imagine such a situation being condoned elsewhere. South of the road, the University team has continued its excavations that has produced several remarkable artefacts.

The National Audit Office has produced a report that makes interesting reading. We have been urging for years that the Museums Department should be allowed to retain the revenue it generates from entrance fees and other sources, rather than that they should go straight to the Treasury. In this day and age, provided that safeguards are provided to ensure the conservation of our irreplaceable archaeological heritage, such a spur to constructive entrepreneurship is essential. However, the Department cannot be expected to make up immediately for all the years of under-funding that have gone before, and it must be recognised that, quite apart from the absolute obligation of any country that has pretensions to civilisation to preserve ancient heritage of which they are but custodians for mankind, these very remains are a priceless investment for Malta's future. It is understood that new legislation will modernise the structure and function of the Department. However commercialisation has not always proved to be the panacea, and requires realistic assessment. The absolute necessity to preserve and conserve the priceless archaeological remains that are the heritage of Mankind cannot always be assured by commercial interests alone and must be guaranteed by Government on behalf of the People.

Nautical archaeology seems to have been relatively neglected in an environment that would seem rich in potential. There are a number of possible reasons for this. The most obvious has been that the resources were used up by the demands of exploration and conservation of the terrestrial heritage; demands that have always been under funded. Other constraints have hitherto been the dearth of trained diver archaeologists, as well as the problems posed by the nature of the sea-bed. However, recent agreements with such experienced bodies as the Institute of Nautical Archaeology at last begin to encourage the hope that this neglect might be at an end. New techniques of under-sea surveys, and the ability to

obtain images below the sea-bed silt, will no doubt open up rich possibilities for scientific exploration. Further potential for the discovery of the remains of ancient vessels remain on what is now dry land and was once the main lagoon haven in the Marsa basin, now occupied by the Marsa Sports Club. As we have suggested in the past Archaeological Reviews, the conditions of wet silt could provide ideal preservation for remains of Roman

and pre-Roman vessels there. The availability of well-tried technologies, such as ground penetrating radar and resistivity measurements, would greatly help both here and in the other "lost" haven at Burmarrad. However, an absolute prerequisite for any serious underwater archaeology is the availability of skills and physical resources for the preservation of timber, in particular, and of artefacts recovered from the deep.

The Archaeological Society

The Archaeological Society of Malta publishes the Malta Archaeological Review annually. Activities are organised throughout the year including talks on archaeology issues as well as site visits led by well known local and international scholars.

Site visits to the Roman Domus at Rabat and to the sanctuary of Tas-Silġ are planned for this year. Lectures will be held in June, July, October and November, at the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta.

The Society welcomes new members. If you wish to join, please contact the Hon. Secretary. Details are available on the inside cover of this Journal.

Albert Mayr (1868-1924)

Hanna Stöger

Examining the legacy of pioneer work in Maltese archaeology

The Bavarian philologist Albert Mayr visited Malta during the autumn and winter months of 1897/98 and a second time in spring 1907. He is considered to have been a pioneer in many ways. His scientific approach to archaeology, at a time when the discipline was just getting beyond the point of myths and fables, enabled him to lay down solid foundations for various parts of Malta's prehistory and history.

Albert Mayr belonged to a time when specialisation was not essential to erudition. It was quite possible for a single mind to dominate a multiplicity of fields of study. He was a philologist excelling in classical languages, this did not restrict him from going into history and archaeology. Being a nineteenth century mind, Mayr applied himself to the full range of Maltese prehistory and history, from the Neolithic to the Norman conquest.

Mayr's publications are well known to today's scholars of Maltese archaeology. However, there seems to be the perception that Mayr's works had been somewhat ignored. This impression is derived from various factors. He received very few official honours for his works, and he never acquired a position within the established academic circle of Munich, the university and the academy. The fact that he wrote in German about a Mediterranean island, which was a British colony, naturally did not make him prominent in Malta.

Mayr reached conclusions that were not in line with the views generally held by Maltese scholars of his time. He systematically dissected his subject, bringing in corroborating evidence for every point introduced. He did not shy away from controversy. Many of Mayr's conclusions, drawn one hundred years ago, were gradually confirmed through the work of later scholars.

Albert Mayr's lifelong relationship with Maltese archaeology started with research for his doctoral thesis. His dissertation consisted of three parts, examining the antiquity and history of the Maltese Islands and Pantelleria until the beginning of the Middle Ages. Mayr's tutor Eugen Oberhummer, whose field of specialisation was historic geography, drew the former's attention towards Malta and encouraged him to work on a historic geographic monograph about Malta. This project finally materialised in Mayr's 1909 book *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*.

Oberhummer's 1895 assessment of Mayr's doctoral thesis states that owing to the sparse written sources, Mayr was compelled to include archaeological evidence. Consequently, he dedicated a major part of his work to the study of numismatic material. In fact, Mayr's essay on Ancient Coins of Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria (1894), forms part of his doctoral thesis. It was singled out and considered suitable for printing and publication according to university requirements. Whereas other sections of his dissertation, foremost Mayr's preliminary desktop-research on the "peculiar monuments of Pre-Roman date in Malta", although being considered more than enough proof of his academic capabilities, were not deemed ready for publication unless an indepth investigation on site was carried out. This set the course for Mayr's first visit to Malta in 1897.

Albert Mayr's publications and study tours

Albert Mayr's works and his study tours are a witness to a lifelong commitment to Mediterranean archaeology with special focus on Malta. Between 1894 and 1926 he published ten essays on Maltese archaeology. His work shows a progressive development, which is collected in his book *Die Insel Malta im Altertum* (1909). He did not return to Malta after publishing his book. Nevertheless, he remained in touch with Maltese archaeology. This is evident in his 1920 publication and the 1926 posthumous publication.

Four of Mayr's early essays have been selected to demonstrate the varied fields of Maltese archaeology to which the scholar applied himself.

1894 - Ancient Coins of Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria

As part of his doctoral thesis Mayr examined a corpus of 23 coins from Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria, roughly datable within the last three centuries BC. His analysis was carried out within the context of classical written sources. The material available to Mayr consisted of the original coins found at the Munich Münzkabinett as well as coin impressions and descriptions from various European collections. A.A. Caruana, then Director of Education in Malta, made a description of the coin collection at the public library in Malta available to Mayr (Mayr 1894:5).

Mayr wrote his first monograph before he ever set foot on Malta. It is striking to learn that from the study of numismatic material alone, he anticipated a good deal of the conclusions archaeology is able to draw today, having a much vaster corpus of archaeological evidence.

A summary of Mayr's numismatic analysis

Contrary to the view held by Maltese historians (Bres 1816; Caruana 1882), Mayr could not conceive that the cities Melite and Goulos had an autonomous mint before the second Punic War. According to Bres, coins with the inscriptions MEAITAIQN belonged to Greek colonies existing in Malta and Gozo between the 8th and 6th century BC. Even Caruana (1882) still maintained such an early date for these coins. Likewise coins with Phoenician inscriptions, according to Bres, were struck by the Phoenicians who had settled in Malta before the Carthaginian rule (Mayr 1894:7).

Mayr argued that none of the coins under investigation could be securely dated back to the period when the islands were under Carthaginian rule. He reasoned that under the Carthaginians even the cities of Motya and Panormos in Sicily ceased to mint their own autonomous coins. Therefore, it seemed unlikely to Mayr that the Maltese cities struck autonomous coins; rather that they used a national Carthaginian coin.

In 218 BC the Maltese islands were handed over to the Romans and became part of the Province of Sicily. Similar to other Sicilian cities with restricted autonomy, the island communities of Malta received coining prerogative. Owing to constitutional relations with Rome these cities could only strike copper coins.

Coins as a cultural reflection

Mayr concluded that the coins provide more of a cultural than a political reflection of the time. He identified a rather unified style which distinguishes Maltese from Sicilian coins. He recognised a strange Mischkultur - Phoenician, Egyptian, Greek and eventually Roman images are found and bear witness to a transition process which took place during the last centuries BC (Mayr 1894:38-40).

Mayr observed that the earlier coins from Melite show an entirely non-Greek character. The style is Egyptianising and the images come from an Egyptian-Phoenician pantheon. Whilst the coins from Pantelleria hardly show any traces of Hellenistic elements, in Malta Hellenistic influence gradually gained ground. However, until a very late stage, a part of the coins still retain Punic legends. The co-existence of a Phoenician and a Greek population is witnessed by the fact that the community simultaneously struck coins with Greek and Phoenician inscriptions. Mayr explained the persistence of Phoenician and Punic elements by ongoing contacts with the Punic cities of the North-African coast. At the same time, the Hellenistic elements received constant reinforcements from the close links with Sicily. Slowly, Roman elements started to infiltrate local culture. Mixed Latin and Greek legends indicate the beginning of a process of Romanisation. The latest coin of the corpus

shows the name of the city still having the Greek ending "Melitas" although written in Latin letters. Mayr read this as an indication for a changed political position and he argued that by then the island probably became a Roman Municipium (Mayr 1894:20-21).

1886 - "On the history of the Older Christian Church of Malta"

In 1886, one year before Mayr's first visit to Malta, he published his second essay: a critical examination of the history of Malta's older church. In a radical, yet scholarly manner, Mayr did away with a good deal of "myths and legends". Many of these traditions are part of Maltese folklore and legend and play a role in the process of maintaining a Maltese "national" consciousness (Luttrell 1975:30). The 28-year-old Mayr, not being conditioned by any of these factors, worked his way through centuries of Maltese church history inexorably dismantling salient pillars of Maltese tradition.

Thorough evaluation of primary sources and a critical approach to the work of contemporary and previous scholars, led Mayr to his own conclusions. In a very matter of fact way he stated that his examinations concerning various traditional Maltese beliefs have led to negative results. Contrary to the belief that St. Paul converted a large part of the population and even founded a Christian community, Mayr concluded that Christianity cannot be dated earlier than the 4th century AD.

Concerning the prevailing traditions that Malta had bishops starting from the early beginnings of Christianity, Mayr's investigations showed that Malta's bishopric was not founded earlier than during the Byzantine period. Regarding the conviction that Christianity survived in Muslim Malta, Mayr claimed that the Muslim conquest led to the complete destruction of the Maltese Church (Mayr 1886:496).

"Catholic, strictly scientific and no apologetics"

Mayr's essay was published in *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görres-Gesellschaft*. It has to be understood within the parameters given by this society, whose stated canon was: "Catholic, strictly scientific and the exclusion of direct apologetics." (Gatz 1988:4)

The essay clearly reflects the objectives pursued by the *Görres Gesellschaft* as well as the society's emphasis on archival research. The year 1888 saw the society's foundation of its institute in Rome. This decision was prompted by Pope Leo XIII's opening of the Vatican archives for historical research in 1880. This event encouraged an enormous influx of scholars and historians from all over Europe. Mayr's 1896 essay on the Early Maltese Church as well as his 1901 essay on the Palaeochristian catacombs of Malta conform well

with the work carried out by contemporary German scholars in Rome.

Heinrich Gelzer (1896), a German Byzantine scholar, wrote a review of Mayr's essay. The critical spirit prevailing among German scholars contemporary with Mayr is perfectly well demonstrated in Gelzer's critique. Gelzer simply states that Mayr's results were to be expected. Not only Malta but many other countries have long lists of alleged early bishops. Gelzer, anticipating Luttrell by 80 years, defines these traditions as "either Medieval fabrications, or erudite but wrong conclusions formed between the 16th and 18th century" (Gelzer 1896:1402). Malta's distorted historiography, after all, might not be a phenomenon as unique as it is locally thought to be. It seems that the most varied political and historical realities can produce similar myths and seem to apply similar myth-making techniques.

1901a: "Palaeochristian Burial Places in Malta"

In 1897, Albert Mayr received a Bavarian archaeological travel grant, and embarked on a study tour to Italy and Greece, including a three month visit to Malta from October 1897 to January 1898. Mayr's archaeological research of Palaeochristian burial places is unmistakably linked with some of the questions he raised in his 1896 essay on the Early Church. He felt the limitations of the written sources and realised that a thorough investigation of the Maltese Palaeochristian monuments might provide answers to some of his open questions. Mayr the "historian" turned to archaeology to aid his historical studies.

In 1898, one year after Mayr's visit to Malta, A.A. Caruana published his *Ancient pagan tombs and Christian cemeteries*. Mayr's own research related to this subject resulted in two papers: his essay on Palaeochristian tombs published in 1901, and his essay on the Phoenician tombs of Malta, presented to the academy in Munich in 1905.

Mayr calls Caruana's report the first serious, detailed account of the catacombs and burial sites. However, since he visited and studied the catacombs himself, just one year before Caruana's book was published, he feels to be in a position to supplement and correct some points. Moreover, he deems it necessary to re-evaluate Caruana's information regarding dating, development and influences from abroad. He takes his critique even further, remarking that the main value of Caruana's work lies in the drawings carried out by Filippo Vassallo; he considers Caruana's accompanying text too general and not providing any information (Mayr 1901a:216).

Mayr did not agree with the criteria Caruana (1898:4-5) applied in order to distinguish between pagan and Christian burials. Contrary to Caruana he concentrated

on identifying architectural patterns and common factors valid for various hypogea. Mayr argued that hypogea, which share close similarities in their layout and architecture, point to the same period of origin (Mayr 1901a:221). Therefore, also hypogea which cannot be identified as Christian through iconography or inscriptions are included in Mayr's categories, since they comply stylistically with those of presumed Christian origin. Since Mayr concentrated on layout and architecture, he distinguished between different tomb-types and identified distinct architectural features. These were mainly corridors and open spaces, providing connections and communication within the hypogea. He forms categories and classifies burial places and hypogea accordingly. In this regard, Mayr seems to be the German equivalent to the Victorian scholar who enjoys establishing categories and classification. One could also speculate that some influence of Darwinism is evident in Mayr's typologies. Mayr's categories follow a linear development or evolution, from relatively simple arrangements to more complex layout and grander scale.

Mayr's conclusions

According to Mayr the earliest form of Maltese Palaeochristian burial site is the small hypogeum with window-tombs. For him these hypogea suggest a specific local development originating from Phoenician burial sites. However, he proposed a relatively late date, the 4th century AD, bringing these small hypogea into close chronological context with the larger catacombs. He knew that it is not always possible to distinguish between Christian and Non-Christian burial sites. He seemed to limit this problem to small hypogea. He had no doubts about the Christian nature of the lesser cemeteries and the major catacombs. In fact, he failed to notice the Jewish Catacombs in the St. Paul and St. Agatha group.

Mayr concluded that the Maltese Palaeochristian burial places were not of great significance. The spatial extension of the single hypogea was very limited. The architecture did not show grand forms. Possible reasons for this could be that the hypogea, except for St. Paul's and Abbazia Tad-Dejr, were not the product of a community but of individual families or groups. Mayr further referred to the sparse use of decoration in the catacombs, whilst he stressed the great care which was undertaken by the masons to cut the tombs. He claimed to recognise the "Phoenician efforts" to create the "house of the dead" as comfortable as possible.

His study of the Palaeochristian burial sites was closely linked with his 1896 essay on the Early Church. Mayr hoped that a thorough investigation of the Maltese burial places might give answers to some of his questions. He asked from where did Christianity come to Malta. After having personally studied the burial places, Mayr concluded that the evidence points to Sicily. Mayr

summarised that all features which did not have local character, betrayed links with Sicily. He added that this was supported by the geographical vicinity and the fact that from the moment reliable written sources pertaining to the Early Maltese church had existed, these sources provided evidence for close links with Sicily.

Since neither the Palaeochristian burial places nor the inscriptions could be securely attributed to the pre-Constantinian period, Mayr reasoned that it was unlikely that there was a considerable spread of Christianity before the 4th century. Mayr could not help it. He had to remark that in the long term St. Paul's visit did not effect the process of Christianisation of the island. With his reference to St. Paul's visit to Malta he linked up again with the point of departure of his 1896 essay on the Early Church.

Contrasting Mayr's essay with Caruana's survey or the work of earlier historians, it is clear that with Mayr a more critical spirit made itself felt. At the same time it has to be emphasised that Mayr's study was only possible since he could base himself on Caruana's survey and Vassallo's drawings.

Mayr had no intention to prove an uninterrupted continuation of Christianity from St. Paul's visit onwards. However, he might have brought along his own bias. On the one hand, he concentrated mainly on finding archaeological proof for his essay on the history of the Early Maltese Church. On the other, he was also a product of his time. He viewed the development of Palaeochristian burial sites as a linear process from

modest beginnings to more elaboration as time passed. He did not give much thought to concurrent or overlapping occurrence. Consequently, he did not identify alteration due to continuous use and adaptations prompted by changing needs and requirements.

1901b "The Prehistoric Monuments of Malta"

His first study tour of 1897/98 provided Albert Mayr with the opportunity to personally investigate the ancient monuments of Malta and Gozo. The need for a detailed field study was already expressed by Mayr's tutor in 1895. Mayr's intention was to catalogue the prehistoric remains as completely as possible. He received much support in Malta, in particular from Father Manuel Magri, and Mrs Luisa Strickland, who helped him in conducting his prehistoric research (Mayr 1901b:721).

Within about three months he re-investigated the remains which had already been recorded and he surveyed sites which had not been investigated to date. He documented the sites, took photographs (fig.1) and when necessary made his own groundplans (fig.2). He considered his attempted documentation incomplete since he had to leave many gaps which were impossible to fill. He complained about the lack of protection and wilful destruction of monuments. He criticised the insufficient recording system of local museums, which made it impossible to trace the provenance of finds (Mayr 1901b:646).

Mayr's prehistoric survey was given considerable attention. His work was not only of interest to German speaking scholars (Lissauer 1901:211-212), but also

fig. 1

Il-Hagra l-Wieqfa, Qala, Gozo, photographed by Albert Mayr in 1897/98 (Mayr 1901b:685, pl. IX)



received international attention. Arthur J. Evans wrote a critique, published in the journal *MAN* (1902:41-44). The leading Italian prehistorian Colini (1902:204-233), published a detailed review of Mayr's essay. Princess Battenberg took care that Mayr's essay was translated into English and printed for private circulation in Malta in 1908.

The recognition of the prehistoric character of the Maltese monuments

Mayr entered the debate at a time when scholars still attributed the prehistoric monuments to "Malta's earliest inhabitants the Phoenician". Jean Houel and Alberto La Marmora had identified the Phoenicians as the builders of these monuments. Local historians Bres, Vassallo (1876) and Caruana (1898) shared this view which found acceptance in Perrot & Chipiez's *Histoire de l'art* (Mayr 1901b:705). Mayr convincingly argued against the Phoenician origin of the Maltese temples (Mayr 1901b:706-709). At the same time he did not take any credit for recognising their prehistoric character. He referred to Henry Rhind (1856:397-400), whom he called one of the first authors who questioned the Phoenician origins of the monuments (Mayr 1901b:705). Already in 1856 Rhind considered these unfounded Phoenician origins "a convenient mystification similar to that so stubbornly bound up in the common epithet Druidical". In prevailing 19th-century ideas everything not being historically classified, was Phoenician, Antediluvian or even Druidical (Daniel & Renfrew 1988:12-13).

Despite some pockets of "Phoenician resistance", represented locally by Lord Strickland, and the works of other scholars who also disputed the Phoenician origins of Malta's megalithic temples, it is still Mayr's essay which has entered the history of Maltese archaeology, marking the definite recognition of the prehistoric character of the temples.

Mayr's methodology

Mayr's first step was to group Malta's prehistoric remains into architectural monuments and artefacts. He further subdivided the architectural monuments into

sanctuaries, fortifications, dwellings and buildings of unclear destination and artificial rock caves. The artefacts were divided into sculpture and pottery. Again, Mayr approached the subject by forming categories and groups. Mayr's descriptions do not merely state what is physically present; they betray a deep understanding of the chronological sequences. He identifies structural changes within the temple development and is able to work out the architectural history of the sites (Evans 1971:95,88,172) and establishes a chronology of temple development (Mayr 1901b:680)

The cultural placing of Malta's monuments according to Mayr

Mayr concluded that the Maltese monuments point to close relationships with the megalithic cultures of the Western Mediterranean. He spoke of an island culture, shared between Malta, Pantelleria, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands and Southeast Spain. On the other hand, by taking into account research on the Aegean and Mycenaean cultures, Mayr admitted that the earlier Aegean cultures exerted considerable influence on the cultures of the Western Mediterranean. He identified Aegean traits in some of the figurines, in the pottery, in the spiral motif and in architectural structures, in particular vaulting (Mayr 1901b:717).

Arthur J. Evans' influence on Mayr

Arthur J. Evans visited Malta in 1897. The Maltese megalithic temples provided him with material for comparison in particular with Mycenaean pillar shrines, baetylic worship and decorative motifs apparently from a Mycenaean source (Evans 1901:196-200). Presumably, the authority of Evans led Mayr to overestimate the influences from the Minoan and Mycenaean world, moving him deeper into the theory of Diffusionism. Evans' 1901 publication prompted Mayr to reconsider some of his conclusions and to adjust his preliminary chronology. Mayr concluded that the beginnings of Malta's megalithic civilisation could be traced far back into Pre-Mycenaean times. However, traces of early Mycenaean civilisation seemed to appear together with the "stippling ornament", therefore the sanctuaries in their later period seemed to belong to the early Mycenaean age (Mayr 1908a:93).

Mayr attacked by T.E. Peet and defeated by Carbon Dating

In an essay published in the Papers of the British School at Rome, T.E. Peet fiercely criticised Mayr. He attacked his overestimation of the strengths of Aegean influence without a single Mycenaean potsherd having been found on the island (Peet 1910:149). Peet systematically argued in favour of a local development of Malta's megalithic culture, anticipating many conclusions archaeology was only able to reach after carbon dating disrupted the whole pattern of diffusionistic explanation. Peet's voice,

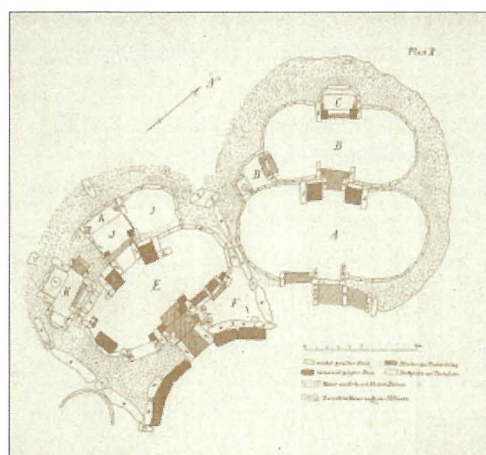


fig. 2
Albert Mayr's plan of Mnajdra, surveyed during 1897/98 (Mayr 1901b:657, plan II)

however, did not reflect the opinion generally held by archaeologists of his time. Up to the time of J. D. Evans' 1959 account of Maltese prehistory, there appeared to be little doubt that the Maltese Temple culture depended for its flowering on stimuli from the Bronze Age cultures of the Aegean, and Maltese archaeology could be explained in that chronological and diffusionistic framework (Bonanno 1993:222). Once radiocarbon analysis (Trump 1966) moved back the chronological parameters, it became evident that the Maltese Temple Culture could not depend on the Aegean Bronze Age chronology. The phenomenon of the temples would thus appear to have developed without any intervention from outside the islands (Renfrew 1976). Mayr, who remained faithful to Aegean influences up to his 1926 posthumous publication, has no place within Renfrew's theory.

Conclusion

Mayr's works and his study tours betray a lifelong dedication to Mediterranean archaeology with a special focus on Malta. Mayr's greatest contribution to Maltese archaeology lies in his objectivity and freshness. With little more than academic connections to Malta he could view things with an objective eye. His systematic way of working further contributed to the objectivity of his analysis.

It is unfortunate that due to various factors, not least publishing in German, Mayr was ignored by some of his contemporaries. Later scholars understood his merits. Today, Albert Mayr is considered to have laid solid foundations for Palaeochristian, Byzantine and Medieval Malta. His strong sense of observation is apparent in his detailed descriptions and surveys of prehistoric Malta. His excellent descriptions proved to be useful and have survived through the works of subsequent scholars.

Acknowledgements

A version of this short paper was delivered to the members of the Malta Archaeological Society in October 1999. I am grateful to Prof. Anthony Bonanno, who was my supervisor when writing my undergraduate long essay on Albert Mayr. Without Prof. Bonanno's help and encouragement the essay could not have been written. His challenging questions provided much food for thought. I also wish to thank Prof. Helga Mach for many stimulating discussions and Dr. Gustav Mahr for his help and support. Many thanks to the curators of the National Museum of Archaeology and special thanks to Dr. Nicholas Vella.

Bibliography

Bonanno, Anthony. 1993. "The Prehistory and Protohistory of the Maltese Islands. Current problems and perspectives", *La preistoria de les illes de la mediterrania occidental. X Jornades d'Estudis Historics Locals*, pp. 215-241, Palma de Mallorca

- Bres, O. 1816. *Malta Antica Illustrata co' Mounumente e coll'Istoria*, I. Rome
- Buhagiar, Mario. 1986. *Late Roman and Byzantine Catacombs and Related Burial Places in the Maltese Islands*. BAR International Series 302. Oxford
- Caruana, A.A. 1882. *Report on the Phoenician and Roman Antiquities in the Group of the Islands of Malta*. Malta : Government Printing Office
1898. *Ancient pagan tombs and Christian cemeteries in the Islands of Malta explored and surveyed from the year 1881 to the year 1897*. Malta: Government Printing Office
- Colini, G.A..1902. "I Monumenti Preistorici di Malta". *Bullettino di paletnologia italiana*, (1902) Anno XXVIII, N. 10-12, pp. 204-233. Parma
- Daniel, Glyn & Renfrew, Colin. 1988. *The Idea of Prehistory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
- Dark, K.R. 1995. *Theoretical Archaeology*. London : Duckworth
- Evans, Arthur J. 1901 "Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations". *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, XXI, (1901), Plate V, pp. 99-204
- 1902 "The Prehistoric Monuments of Malta", *MAN* (1902), pp. 41-44 London: The Anthropological Institute
- Evans, J.D. 1959. *Malta Ancient Peoples and Places* London: Thames and Hudson
1971. *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: a survey* London: Univ. of London, The Athlone Press
- Gatz, Erwin. 1988. "Das Römische Institut der Görres-Gesellschaft 1888-1988". In *Römische Quartal Schrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte*, Gatz, Erwin et al. eds. Festschrift zum einhundertjährigen Bestehen der Römischen Quartalschrift und des Römischen Institutes der Görres-Gesellschaft, Band I, pp. 3-18. Rom Freiburg Wien: Herder
- Gelzer, Heinrich.1896. "A. Mayr, Zur Geschichte der älteren..." (review) "*Wochenschrift für klassische Philologie*", Andresen, Georg et al. eds., XIII (1896); pp. 1402-1403. Berlin: R. Gaertners Verlagsbuchhandlung
- Lissauer, Abraham. 1901. "Mayr, Albert, Die Vorgeschichtlichen Denkmäler von Malta" (review) *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, ZfE 33 (1901), pp. 211-212
- Luttrell, Anthony T. ed. 1975. *Medieval Malta Studies on Malta before the Knights* London: The British School at Rome
- Mayr, Albert. 1894. "Die antiken Münzen der Inseln Malta, Gozo und Pantelleria". In *Jahresbericht über das K. Wilhelms-Gymnasium zu München für das Studienjahr 1893/94*, pp. 3-40. München
1896. "Zur Geschichte der älteren christlichen Kirche von Malta". In *Historisches Jahrbuch der Görresgesellschaft* (1896), Band XVII, pp. 475-496. Rom Freiburg Wien : Herder
1898. "Pantelleria". *Mitteilungen des K.D. Archäologischen Institutes Rom* 1898; Bd. XIII., pp. 367-398. Rom
- 1901a "Die altchristlichen Begräbnisstätten auf Malta". *Römische Quartalsschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte*, pp. 216-243 and 352-384. Rom Freiburg Wien : Herder

- 1901b. "Die vorgeschichtlichen Denkmäler von Malta". In *Abhandlungen der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, I. Cl. XXI. Bd. III. Abth., pp. 645-721. München : Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
1905. "Aus den phönikischen Nekropolen von Malta". In *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, (vorgelegt in der Philos.-Philol. Klasse am 3. Juni 1905), pp. 467-509. München : Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
- 1908a. *The Prehistoric Remains of Malta*. Translated from the German. Malta : Printed for Private Circulation
- 1908b "Eine vorgeschichtliche Begräbnisstätte auf Malta". *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vierzigster Jahrgang (1908), pp. 536-542. Berlin : Behrend
1909. *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*. München : C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung
1914. "Über die vorrömischen Denkmäler der Balearen". In *Sitzungsberichte der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Philosophisch-philogogische und historische Klasse, Jahrgang 1914, 6. Abhandlung, pp. 3-68 München : Verlag der Königlich Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
1920. "Neue vorgeschichtliche Funde auf Malta aus den Jahren 1912-1916". *Korrespondenz-Blatt der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, Thilenius, Georg, ed.; Jahrg. 51 (1920), pp. 1-7
Braunschweig : Friedr. Vieweg & Sohn
1922. "Die archaeologischen Arbeiten des "Institut D'Estudis Catalans". *Phil. Woch.* 1922, 43
1926. "Malta". In *Reallexikon der Vorgeschichte*, Ebert, Max ed., VII, pp. 356-370. Berlin : Walter de Gruyter & Co. (published posthumously)
- Peet, T.E. 1910. "Contributions to the study of the prehistoric period in Malta". In *Papers of the British School at Rome*, Vol. V. No. 3, pp. 141-163 London: The British School at Rome
- Renfrew, Colin. 1972. "Malta and the calibrated radiocarbon chronology" *Antiquity*, Vol. XLVI (1972) pp. 141-144
1976. *Before Civilisation the Radio Carbon Revolution and prehistoric Europe*. 1st published 1973. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth
- Rhind, A. Henry. 1856. "Memoir on Megalithic Remains in Malta". *The Archaeological Journal* VIII (1856), pp. 397-400. London: The Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland
- Stöger, Hanna. 1999. *Albert Mayr 1868-1924, A Legacy of Pioneer Work, an evaluation of Mayr's contributions to the works of later scholars*.
Unpublished BA (Hons) Long Essay. University of Malta
- Trump, D.H. 1966. *Skorba*. Oxford: The Society of Antiquaries and The National Museum of Malta
- Vassallo, Cesare. 1876. *Dei Monumenti Anitichi del Gruppo di Malta*. 2nd edition. Malta: Government Printing Press

Ghajn Klieb, Rabat (Malta)

Nicholas C. Vella with Kevin Borda, Josef M. Briffa, Katrin Fenech, Kristi Grinde, Eleanor Scerri, Matthew Sisk, Hanna Stöger and Maria Elena Zammit

A preliminary report of an archaeological survey

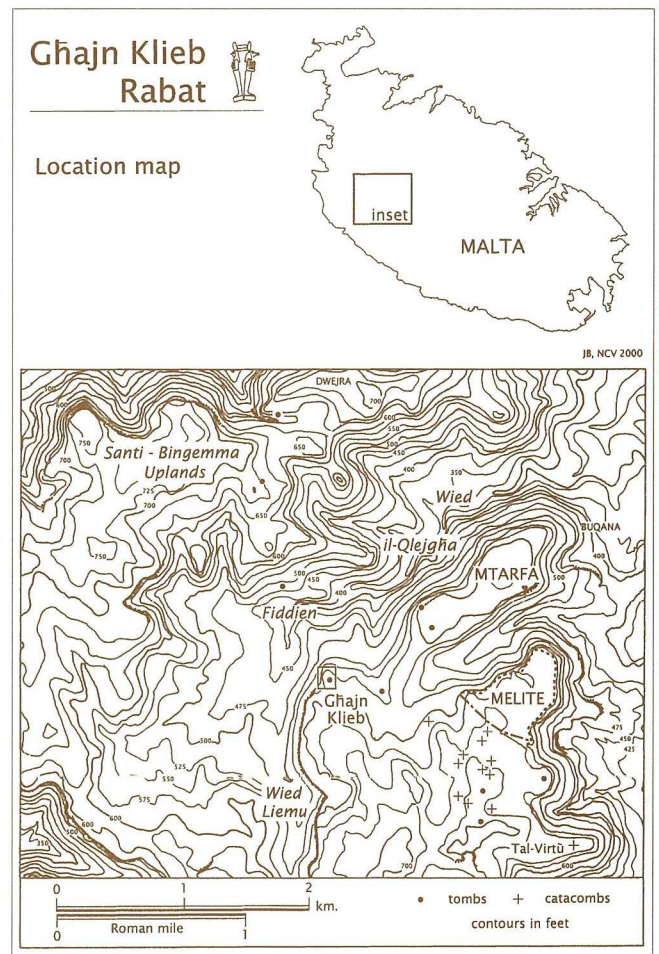
Between October and December 1999 a team of local and foreign undergraduates from the University of Malta carried out a survey of the site at Ghajn Klieb outside Rabat. The exercise constituted the practical part of a unit on the Principles of Archaeological Surveying directed by Dr Nicholas Vella of the Department of Classics & Archaeology. For the survey the team was joined by Hanna Stöger, a graduate of the same department, who also researched some of the references used in this article. Initial reconnaissance of the site was carried out on 15 October 1999 with Nathaniel Cutajar and Michelle Buhagiar, Curator and Assistant Curator respectively at the National Museum of Archaeology. The scatter of surface ceramics and the existence of previously known and unknown features revealed the extent and potential of the site. It was decided that the locality of Ghajn Klieb warranted systematic study that could be carried out in various stages, with the long-term aim being an assessment of human activity and cultural behaviour at the site. The Museums Department gave the go-ahead for this project, and permission to collect the surface ceramics was granted. This short report is intended to give an outline of the work undertaken to date. Emphasis is placed on the field methods adopted and on the presentation of what we believe to be worth talking about at this stage. An effort is here made by the senior author to unravel the collaborative nature of the exercise by lending weight to individual thoughts and interpretations that arose while work progressed in the field.

Geomorphology and land use

The locality known as Ghajn Klieb (GR 44500, 71525) occupies a spur of the Rabat-Dingli Uplands in west-central Malta (Figure 1). Topographically, this region is clearly marked. To the east, the Coralline Limestone plateaus at Mtarfa, Mdina-Rabat, Tal-Virtù and Verdala stand at a height of 180 m. overlooking the central plain; deeply incised valleys with streams that descend to the central plain cut back in the upland giving the plateau an extremely irregular outline. To the west, a minor though well-defined escarpment with a precipitous drop of 15 m. runs south from the spur at Ghajn Klieb to Dingli overlooking Wied Liemu, a tributary of the main stream draining Wied Qlejgha, converging at Fiddien Bridge. At a height of 178.9 m. Ghajn Klieb overlooks the upper Wied Qlejgha and the undulating and rocky Santi-Bingemma Uplands to the north, with views of Mdina to the East and Qalet Marku Bay to the North-East.

Present-day land use of the Ghajn Klieb area (Figure 2) is typical of Upper Coralline hill-lands elsewhere in this region of the island. Bleak *xaghra* lands characterise the higher, exposed parts of the spur (Fields I-IV) with fig trees, laurel and rose bushes growing inside the sheltered rock-cut tombs, pits and other crevices, while stone huts serve as observatories for bird-trapping or hunting; walled plots of land to the south-east sustain a mixture of almond, olive and carob trees, while to the east (Fields X-XI) fields lie fallow or abandoned having once been sustained by wind-pump irrigation; one field (VI; *id-demmiela*) with an entrance on the road has been partly cleared to bedrock and manure is left to settle there. On the fringe-slopes of the spur to the north, amidst a clump of mature carob and olive trees, a farmhouse controls narrow, terraced plots of agricultural land on lease from the Government (Cabreo 1867: tenement garden 471). One of the present owners rears fowl in the stockyard at the back of the farmhouse. A commercial poultry farm occupies a large building to the south-east, enlarged over the last two decades. A cluster of rooms further south lie abandoned amidst overgrowth, olive and almond trees, overlooked to the east by an enlarged

fig. 1 Site location map



farmhouse converted into a residence; one of the rooms is partly rock-cut, where an abandoned kiln is served by two chimneys built of brick. To the west, a car scrapyard occupies an abandoned field.

Past fieldwork

Archaeological discoveries at Ghajn Klieb have been reported since the last quarter of the nineteenth century (Table 1). It was probably a combination of antiquarian lore and the popular legend associated with the toponym Ghajn Klieb (Cassar Pullicino 1975: 99) that brought the local litterati to the area. The earliest reported discovery at Ghajn Klieb goes back to 3rd October 1890 when a “tomb-cave” was discovered by the Governor’s wife, Lady Smyth, accompanied by Dean Vassallo and Major Baden Powell. A. A. Caruana, Director of Education, reported the discovery in a letter to the *Malta Times* a few days later, informing the public that the objects were presented by Lady Smyth to the National Museum. In actual fact, one of three bracelets (probably of gilt leather) lifted from the tomb (Mayr 1905: pl. III), depicting griffons on either side of a stylised palmette, was donated to the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (no. G440; Evans 1900: 8-9). Subsequent to this discovery, Caruana provided details of other tombs examined and surveyed between 1881 and 1897 in the same locality in his monograph on the ancient pagan tombs of Malta (1898). In her forthcoming monograph on Punic Malta, Claudia Sagona refers to the discovery of another tomb in January 1887. In his capacity of Curator of the National Museum, Themistocles Zammit inspected a large tomb (Z, see below) with several rock-cut niches in the area in October 1906 whence he lifted a small composite gold amulet representing the ancient Egyptian gods Horus and Anubis. Zammit returned again to Ghajn Klieb in the spring of 1926 and 1933 to survey other tombs. The only other pertinent reference to the area is David Trump’s (1990: 91), who places here the ruins of a Roman round tower.

Present fieldwork: design and methodology

The primary aim of this first stage of fieldwork was to prepare a plan of the site because although we came across evidence that one was prepared in 1925, this was not traced in the National Museum archives or at the Chief Draughtsman’s office. The plan was limited to Fields I-IV, covering an area of approximately 0.9 ha. A combination of traverse and chain survey was carried out over several days and a plan was drawn at a scale of 1:200 (Figure 3). Sixteen rock-cut tombs (A-K, M-S) were plotted together with two bell-shaped pits (U, V), various rock-cut features (L, T, W-Y), and quarry marks; six tombs in Field V where noted but remain to be planned. Given constraints of time and weather, only



Plate 1 Prof. Themistocles Zammit investigating Tomb B, Ghajn Klieb. May 1926. Photo probably by H.D. Colt. University of Malta Library.

plans and sections of a small selection of tombs (R, J, F) were drawn, at a scale of 1:20, complementing those (of tombs B, J, Z) in the archives at the National Museum. It should be noted that the survey could only be carried out once the fig trees and wild rose bushes growing inside the sheltered tomb shafts were trimmed. While the survey was being undertaken discrete concentrations of stone and soil heaps were identified close to some of the tombs, clearly spoil from past explorations of the area; their position and extent was added to the plan. The team also observed scatters of pottery on the calcareous rock and in small soil pockets and other crevices. It became clear that part of our work would have to account for the distribution and patterning of artefacts over the terrain. The study of the movement of artefacts from a buried, rock-cut site to the surface, and other processes that create surface sites, has not been tackled systematically in Maltese archaeology. At Ghajn Klieb we are interested to know where the surface scatter was deposited or disturbed by cultural and natural processes, by noting the deterioration of the artefacts from exposure to the elements. We also became aware that the rock surface at Ghajn Klieb had been quarried repeatedly, even cutting through at least two rock-cut tombs (C, D). This evidence could be put to good use as it immediately provided us at least with an idea of a sequence of events through time. Indeed, the value of recording rock-cut and other structural features has already been stressed by other landscape archaeologists, who maintain that ‘whereas a variety of forces disperse artefacts over the terrain, features often represent permanent, in situ elements of the landscape and thus are better markers of cultural behaviour.’ (Kardulias *et al.* 1995: 9)

These, and others, were problems that stimulated and steered our thinking during the course of the fieldwork.

The strategy followed in investigating this site was to collect *all* the artefacts present on the surface of Field I. A grid of 2 m. squares was laid out from a line starting at Site Station XX and running along the north-east rubble wall in Field I. Each square was inspected with great care, often on hands and knees when rock-pools or low vegetation provided poor visibility. Every artefact, including pottery sherds and utensils of enamel, tin and iron, within each square was collected and bagged.

Preliminary results: narrating thoughts and interpretations

The work conducted thus far at Ghajn Klieb has led to some important observations and conclusions. Of all the tombs investigated earlier this century, nine have been identified. These are: tomb Z with its chamber right underneath the secondary road; the series of tombs AA-DD along the face of a rock-cut depression skirting the alleyway leading to the farmhouse, already noted by Caruana (Table 1); and tombs C, B, E, K, and N. In a photo (Plate 1) traced at the Palestine Exploration Fund in London (Vella & Chapman forthcoming), Temi Zammit is seen writing in his notebook inside the shaft of tomb B, surrounded by local farmers in traditional garb. Those fifteen tombs ‘cleared and surveyed’ by Lewis Upton Way, Harris Colt and Robert Galea in May 1925 on the rocky plateau at Li Msierah tan-Nigret (MAR 1925-26: III) are none other than the tombs and the pits in Field I. Maps at the Lands Department clearly refer to the area with that name rather than the commonly known toponym Ghajn Klieb; besides, faint traces of the number fifteen in Roman numerals can be made out above the entrance to the chamber of tomb F. Also, in a manuscript held at the University of Malta Library, Paul Bellanti ([1910-1912]: 64-66, 244) uses the Nigret

Plate 2 The large farmhouse at Ghajn Klieb with the threshing floor in the foreground. May 1926. Photo probably by H.D. Colt. University of Malta Library.

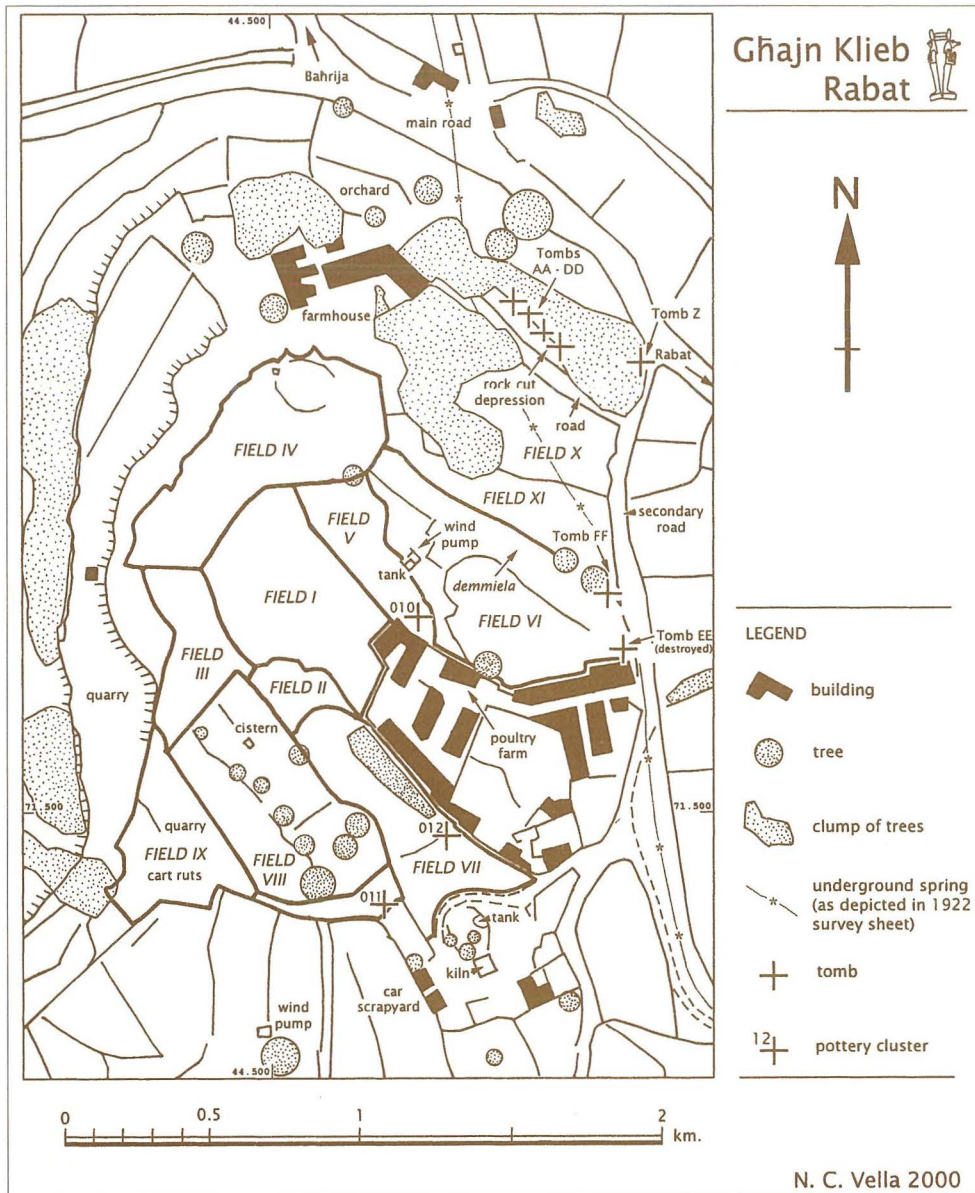


toponym for the barren ground where he inspected eleven tombs. The ‘northernmost tomb with a deep shaft’ and ‘steps at the side’ is probably tomb E, while ‘the tomb with two chambers on two sides of the shaft next to each other’ would correspond to the layout of tomb N; the tomb with ‘a gutter that divides a one-chambered tomb longitudinally for nearly the whole of its length, then, near the door, it turns at right angles towards one of the sides reaching nearly the side-wall’ is probably to be identified with tomb K.

‘Tomb Z (Figure 2), whence the gold amulet was lifted, was re-located on 24th February 2000 by two members of the team (HS, NCV) assisted by Keith Buhagiar. A wall three courses high surrounds the deep shaft of the tomb. Hanna Stöger remarked that it was unclear whether tomb Z was the same tomb opened by Lady Smyth in 1890 and reported by Caruana (1898: 67, pl. XII, fig. 1). In manuscript notes held at the National Museum of Archaeology, Bellanti (nd: 33) refers to the tomb opened by Smyth, stating that ‘years after Prof. Zammit on re-opening it found in the litter the magnificent gold idol now in the Museum’. Even in the guide to the Valletta museum (Zammit 1919: 41) the objects lifted by Smyth and the gold idol are placed in the same show case, with only one tomb at Ghajn Klieb listed as provenance. But in spite of these textual glosses the data refuse to gel into a clear picture. It is hard to believe that no mention whatsoever is made by Caruana (1890, 1898) of 45 niches or *columbaria*, even if we suppose that he was too busy to make a trip to Rabat while warding off accusations of slander and defamation. Besides, in his letter to the newspaper, Caruana states clearly that the tomb was discovered ‘owing to the falling of a portion of its roof’. Now tomb Z has no holes through the roof, which is intact. It also lacks the steps and the deep trench or gutter described by Caruana, while the shaft is 3 feet shorter. Although nothing resembling Smyth’s tomb as reported by Caruana has been located,

we find it difficult to reconcile tomb Z with Smyth’s tomb and we contend that these are two different tombs.

The issue of whether remains of a Roman tower exist at Ghajn Klieb was also brought up during the fieldwork, when the team was surveying a large circular feature in Field IV, consisting of a semi-circular cut in the rock and a low semi-circular wall. Trump’s suggestion should be considered if only because dimensions and topography recall sites in Malta with remains of round towers dating to the third century AD. We found no



or overburden was removed; narrow grooves and cuts made to dislodge the blocks, are visible along the vertical walls of the quarry. In Fields II and VII, however, a different quarrying system was in operation, dislodging boulders and leaving irregularly-shaped cuts or scoops in the rock; the boulders were probably fed into the kiln nearby to produce quicklime (*ġir*).

Dating of the quarries is, of course, fraught with difficulties because the method of cutting stones has remained largely unchanged since antiquity. The room built above the kiln does not feature in the 1922 survey sheet of Ghajn Klieb, so an early twentieth-century date for the second type of quarry could be put forward if the connection with lime burning is correct. For the quarry in Field IV, a *terminus post quem* would be provided by tombs C and D, if only dates for their use were available; tomb B nearby would suggest the possibility of utilisation down to the 1st century AD (C. Sagona, pers. comm.).

fig. 2. Land use and archaeological remains of the Ghajn Klieb area

other evidence, however, to posit the existence of a round tower. The name of the locality, *Il-qigha ta' Ghajn Klieb* ('the threshing floor of Ghajn Klieb') would suggest that the circular feature is exactly what local farmers say it is: a platform for threshing and winnowing cereals, cut into an earlier quarry that destroyed tombs C and D (Figure 3, Plate 2). Although a threshing floor would not be out of place in a context of ancient death rituals, as Kevin Borda pointed out to us quoting an episode from the Bible (Genesis 50:10), the arrangement at Ghajn Klieb would seem to be contemporary with the nearby farmhouse or its precursor. A few metres away, a post-hole with concentric marks around it provides evidence for another threshing floor over a quarried surface, the marks having been produced by the trampling hooves of an ass or a horse.

Two types of quarry were noted at Ghajn Klieb (Figure 3). The first, just mentioned, was used to extract ashlar blocks for use in coursed masonry from the surface outcrop in Fields III and IV, once the superficial layer

The presence of terracotta lozenge-shaped tiles, observed to cluster on rubble heaped by the side of fields (GHK99/010, GHK99/011), and commonly used for tiling floors of villa and bathing establishments of Roman Imperial date in Malta (Magro Conti 1996: 135-136, 157, fig. 20), would suggest the existence of a substantial building in Roman times in the area, for which stone would have been needed for construction; the Paleochristian catacombs noted by Caruana (Buhagiar 1986: 221) are in fact dug into the face of a large rectangular rock-cut depression which could have started as a quarry. Likewise, the presence of Medieval pottery from the dump in tomb Z noted by T. Zammit, for which Nathaniel Cutajar has put forward to us an early eleventh-century date, would suggest the possibility of a rural establishment here at the time. Finally, 'a kiln located in an orchard with a vineyard', 'in contrata Hayn il Klieb', in the Late Middle Ages, intended for the baking of terracotta roof tiles (Buhagiar & Fiorini 1996: 68 – a reference we owe to Keith Buhagiar), provides evidence of activity in the locality immediately prior to the Early Modern period when the district is then known for its vineyards and orchard (*giardino di diversi alberi*;

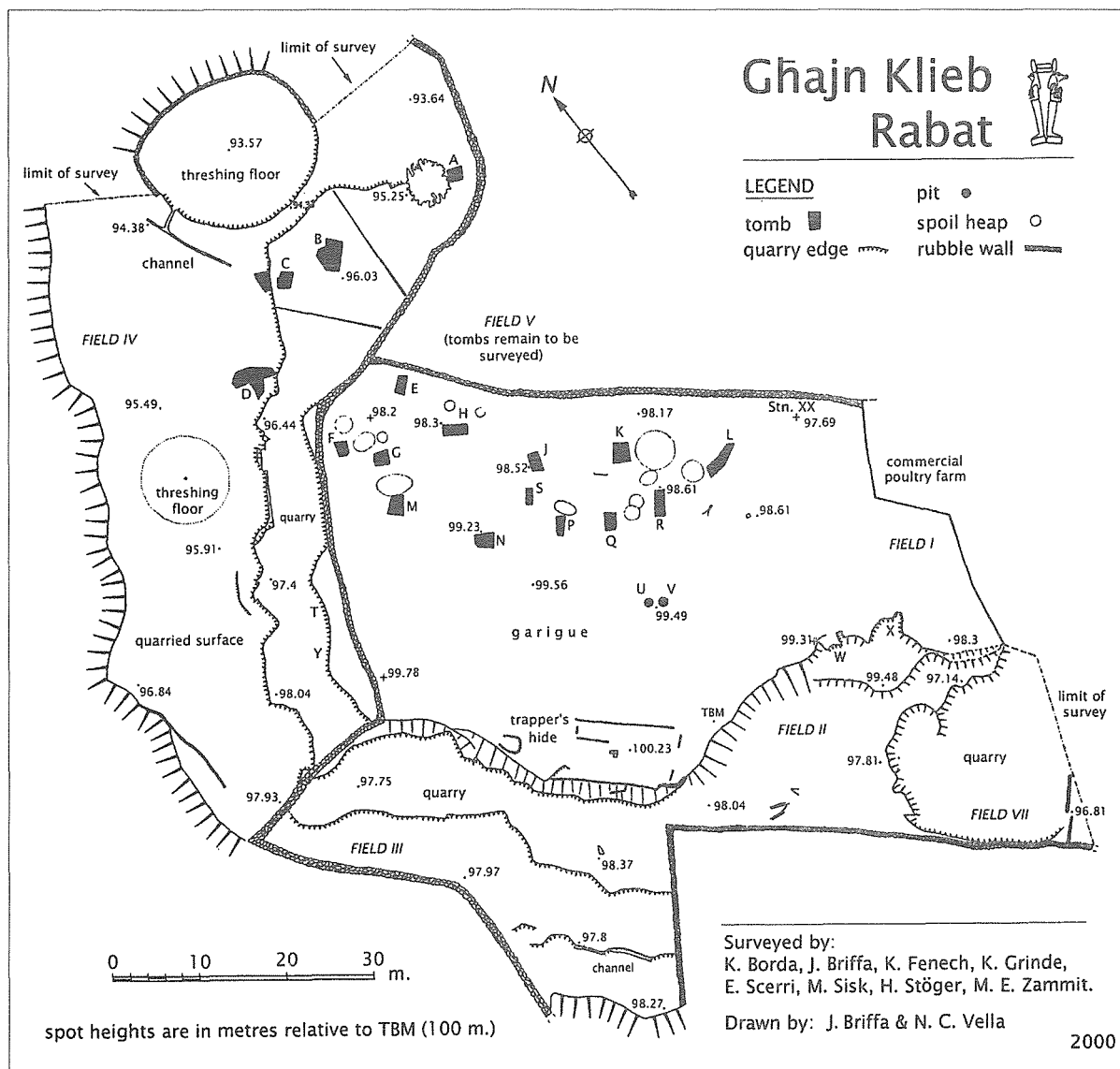


fig. 3.
Site plan of
Ghajn Klieb

Wettinger 2000: 185). Having said this, it is still tempting to think that the blocks quarried from Fields III and IV were intended for the construction of the nearby farmhouse in the nineteenth century at the latest; the quarrymen would have recognised the suitability of the stone by observing the cuts in the rock where the tomb shafts had been dug.

Finally, prehistoric activity at Ghajn Klieb is suggested by the presence of the two bell-shaped pits (U, V) in Field I. A cut in the rock which channels water away from the pits suggests that these were not meant to be cisterns. Elsewhere in Malta such pits set in a landscape not dissimilar to Ghajn Klieb, are usually indicative of a Late Bronze Age site; amongst the sherds collected, now undergoing study by Maria Elena Zammit, are a few of Borg in-Nadur phase, thus lending strength to our proposition. It is also likely that tomb L was originally a similar pit to which a shaft was added.

Concluding remarks

The observations and preliminary results presented here are meant to put on paper our initial thoughts and related problems, and to provoke discussion. If cultural

behaviour on the garigue at Ghajn Klieb appears chronologically fuzzy, we hope to have given at least an insight into why this is so. Meanwhile, the study of the scores of pottery sherds has only just started. The time-consuming investment in intensive surface collection is justified, in our opinion, by the need to understand what happens to artefacts once they are exposed. General principles of settlement and land use will only emerge from the systematic study of sites in locations that are similar and different, that are contemporary and not. The archaeology of the Maltese countryside is an interesting and challenging pursuit: this is an exercise that necessitates comparisons between data along divergent trajectories of time and space. This is, we believe, one way of writing a cultural history of the long-term.

Postscript

On 8th April 2000, Keith Buhagiar informed the senior author that authorised excavation works for a substation at Ghajn Klieb had destroyed a tomb, EE (Figure 2).

The damage sustained was confirmed the following day. On behalf of the National Museum of Archaeology, members of the team (HS, MEZ, JMB, NCV) recorded what remained, excavating one layer of reddish-brown deposit (GHK99/1003) at the bottom of a section of the mutilated chamber. Two fragments of glass, a few pot sherds and some human bones were recovered. A report has been prepared (Vella *et al.* 2000). Another tomb, FF (Figure 2) was also located nearby under a carob tree. Joseph Magro Conti from the Environmental Management Unit of the Planning Authority visited the site to ensure that a larger buffer zone is drawn up for the Ghajn Klieb area in an effort to protect its unique cultural heritage.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the team, the senior author would like to thank the following: Anthony Bonanno, Keith Buhagiar,

Michelle Buhagiar, Charles Dalli, Edgar Depasquale, Aloisia de Trafford, Nathaniel Cutajar, Karmenu Farrugia (Lands Department), Reuben Grima, Joseph Magro Conti, Joe Mifsud (Chief Draughtsman's Office), Claudia Sagona, John Samut-Tagliaferro, Katya Stroud; they will all know why their name appears here.

References

- P. Bellanti. nd. *Manuscript notes on various archaeological sites in the Maltese Islands*. National Museum of Archaeology Archives.
 [1910-1912] *The Rock Tombs of Malta*. University of Malta Library Archives.
 M. Buhagiar. 1986. *Late Roman and Byzantine Catacombs and Related Burial Places in the Maltese Islands*. BAR International Series 302. Oxford.
 M. Buhagiar & S. Fiorini. 1996. *Mdina: the Cathedral City of Malta*. 2 vols. Central Bank of Malta, Malta.

Table 1 Discoveries at Ghajn Klieb, Rabat
 (source: partly original and partly after Sagona forthcoming)

Date & Location	Reference	Excavator	No of tombs	Sagona's Gaz. No.	Identification on Figs 2, 3
? <i>Ghajn-Klieb</i>	Caruana 1898: 71, pl. XIV, figs 3-4	A. Caruana	4 tombs	—	Tombs AA-DD
3 October 1890	Caruana 1898: 67, pl. XII, fig. 1	Lady Smyth	1 tomb	—	?
January 1887	Correspondence Caruana-Hutchinson	A. Caruana	old tomb caves	[85]	Tombs AA-DD ?
1890-1891	Caruana 1898: pl XI, 1	A. Caruana	1 tomb	[87]	?
1890-1891	Caruana 1898: pl. XI, 2	A. Caruana	1 tomb	[88]	?
1890-1891	Caruana 1898: pl. XI, 3	A. Caruana	1 double tomb	[89]	?
1890?	Caruana 1898: 71, pl. XIV, figs 1-2	A. Caruana ?	1 tomb	[91]	?
13 October 1906 <i>Ghain Klieb</i>	MAR 1907: E2-3	T. Zammit	1 tomb	[90]	Tomb Z
12 May 1926 <i>Ghain Klieb</i>	MAR 1926-27: IV	T. Zammit	1 double tomb	[92]	Tomb B
16 May 1926 <i>Ghain Klieb</i>	MAR 1926-27: IV	T. Zammit	1 double tomb	[93]	Tomb J ?
12 May 1933 <i>Il-Qigha ta Ghain Klieb</i>	MAR 1933-34: VII	T. Zammit	1 double tomb 1 double tomb 1 tomb 1 double tomb	[94] [95] [96] [97]	? Tomb C ? ?
30 May 1925 <i>Li Msierah tan-Nigret</i>	MAR 1925-1926: III	L. U. Way, H. Colt, R. Galea	15 tombs	—	Tombs in Field I

- Cabreo 1867 = No 368 Old Tenement, New Tenement 471. Pianta del Giardino denominato Ghain Cliep Sito nei limiti della Notabile e nella strada ta l'Imtahlep. In Hon. Giovanni Vella, *Descriptive Plans of the Crown Property in Malta and its Dependencies*. Malta.
- A. A. Caruana. 1890. Discovery of a Roman tomb-cave at Notabile. *Malta Times* second supplement 17 October 1890, [p. 9].
1898. *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries in the Islands of Malta explored and surveyed from the year 1881 to the year 1897*. Government Printing Office, Malta.
- J. Cassar Pullicino. 1975. Norman Legends in Malta. In *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights*, edited by Anthony Luttrell, pp. 96-103. London, The British School at Rome.
- P. N. Kardulias, T. E. Gregory, & J. Sawmiller. 1995. Bronze Age and Late Antique Exploitation of an Islet in the Saronic Gulf, Greece. *Journal of Field Archaeology* 22: 3-21.
- J. Magro Conti. 1996. *Roman Bathing Establishments in Malta and Gozo*. 2 vols. Unpublished BA (Hons) Long Essay, University of Malta.
- MAR = *Annual Report on the Working of the Museum Department*. Government Printing Office, Malta.
- A. Mayr. 1905. *Aus den phönikischen Nekropolen von Malta*. K. B. Akademie der Wissenschaften, München.
- C. Sagona. Forthcoming. *The Archaeology of Punic Malta*. Peeters Press, Leuven.
- D. H. Trump. 1990. *Malta: An Archaeological Guide*. 2nd edition. Progress Press, Malta.
- N. C. Vella, K. Chetcuti Bonavita, E. DeGaetano, K. Fenech, and J. Samut-Tagliaferro. 2000. *Report on the Salvage Excavation of Tomb EE at Għajn Klieb, Rabat (Malta) on behalf of the National Museum of Archaeology*. Department of Classics & Archaeology, University of Malta. Unpublished.
- N. C. Vella & R. L. Chapman. Forthcoming. Harris Dunscombe Colt in Malta. *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*.
- G. Wettinger. 2000. *Place-names of the Maltese Islands ca. 1300-1800*. PEG Publications, Malta.
- T. Zammit. 1919. *Guide to the Valletta Museum with a historical summary*. Government Printing Office, Malta.

Castellu di la Chitati

Stephen C. Spiteri

The medieval castle of the old town of Mdina

One of the least understood of all the works of fortification to have stood watch over the Maltese islands in antiquity is the *castellu di la chitati*¹ - the medieval castle of the old town of Mdina. The arcanum that surrounds this ancient stronghold stems primarily from the fact that it was dismantled way back in the 15th century and what little had remained of the building thereafter, eventually disappeared altogether in the metamorphosis that accompanied the Hospitaller re-fortification of the medieval town into a gunpowder fortress throughout the course of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. This, coupled with the limited nature of contemporary documentary information has ensured that the true form and features of the medieval stronghold have been lost to the point that now only archaeology can hope to really figure out.

Whilst acknowledging the severe limitations imposed by any approach that falls short of a full archaeological investigation, this paper seeks to re-examine the existing documentary, cartographic and physical evidence unearthed to-date in order to suggest a rudimentary model of Mdina's medieval stronghold. Undoubtedly, the greatest contribution to-date to the study of Mdina and its medieval fortifications has been the masterly work of Prof. Stanley Fiorini and Dr. Mario Buhagiar.² This paper only undertakes to re-evaluate the evidence and some of the conclusions presented so far in the light of my own research into medieval military architecture and castle typologies.

It has long been recognized that the medieval fortifications of Mdina consisted of two main defensive elements - a fortified town and a castle. Gio. Francesco Abela pointed this out in his *Della Descrizione di Malta* as far back in 1647.³ Contemporary medieval archival documentation has been shown to differentiate between the two entities, referring to the town as the *castrum civitatis malte* and the castle as the *castellu di la chitati*⁴ (*nonetheless the distinction between the two is sometimes dropped*). The word *castrum* was originally applied to large fortified Roman military camps but came to be used to describe most walled towns or other fortified settlements of a non-purely military nature throughout the middle ages. The *castellu*, or *castellum*, on the other hand represents the low Latin diminutive of *castrum* and refers to a type of fort, although it also came to be applied to a specialized fortified structure that appeared with the formation of a new social organization in the middle ages.⁵

At Mdina, these two fortified entities seem to have been closely interwoven, such that the walls of one were coterminous with those of the other.⁶ Together they occupied a relatively small area at the tip of a strategically sited plateau - part of the site which once served to accommodate a much larger Roman, and earlier Punic, fortified town.⁷ This site, standing as it is at the very heart of the island, was a natural focal point of refuge commanding clear views of the greater part of the island's coastline. Inhabited since prehistoric times, it appears to have originated as one of the island's *fluchtorte*⁸ established during the insecure Bronze Age period until it eventually rose in importance as a settlement to become the dominating administrative and political centre in Punic and Roman times.

Given this continual process of occupation and settlement, the first difficulty besetting the study of the medieval defences of Mdina is precisely that of establishing some kind of date for the transformation of the Roman city into the medieval fortress. As yet, this is still very much an obscure process. The abandonment of the greater part of the larger Roman enceinte for a smaller and more easily defensible perimeter was a common enough phenomenon throughout the Mediterranean in the troubled and insecure times that followed the collapse of the Roman empire, characterized by a significant shrinkage in urban populations. Inevitably, the ancient city itself came to be responsible for much of the character of the subsequent fortress for it provided the site, possibly a large part of the lateral walls and most of the building materials for the construction of the medieval ramparts.

The lack of any precise knowledge of this process of transformation, however, has seen most historians take refuge behind the popular notions that accredit the establishment of Mdina's medieval enclosure to either the Arabs or the Byzantines, or both. Determining this particular point, however, is of fundamental importance to the study of the medieval fortifications of Mdina, and is particularly crucial to understand the nature and development of the *castellum*.

Archaeological evidence tends to suggest that the medieval front was definitely in existence by the late Arab period. The presence of a late Muslim cemetery *extra muros* not far from Greek's Gate (near the Roman town-house), together with the toponymy of Mdina itself, (derived from 'Medina', Arabic for fortified city) has always been taken as proof that it was the Arabs who had redefined the city's layout, establishing its present

form.⁹ However, this need not necessarily be the case for the Arab occupation of Malta seems to have been accomplished over a period of time following a succession of brazen raids from nearby Sicily. Archaeological remains at Tas-Silġ, for example, have shown the presence of various destruction layers and hastily built defensive walls around the Byzantine structures dating to around the 8th century.¹⁰ The same process of retrenchment may have occurred at the town of Melita, where the Byzantine garrison, under increasing Arab pressure could have been compelled to rationalize the defence of the large town reducing it to more defensible proportions over a period of a few decades by pulling back the front to a narrower part of plateau, exploiting any defensive topographical features to such effect and reinforcing it with a fort. A Byzantine origin, then, could imply that the latter medieval castle, rather than having been built *de novo* in Swabian times, as has been suggested,¹¹ may have emerged from the foundations of a Byzantine fort.

This would explain why the medieval castle occupied the same plane as the town and was actually incorporated into the main enceinte. Unlike the *Castrum Maris* and the *Castrum* in Gozo, there was no attempt to raise the Mdina castle to a domineering height over its adjoining *burgum* - an important characteristic feature of most veritable feudal strongholds. It is evident that the layout at Mdina did not respect the established feudal hierarchy whereby the smaller castle commanded the larger town even though the Norman garrison would have been surrounded by a predominantly Muslim population and would have sought a measure of safety in such a formula. True, the nature of the plateau did not provide the opportunity but this could have been quickly remedied by the construction of an artificial mound - a common enough practice with Norman keeps. That this practice was not sought in Mdina suggests that the Normans must have found an existing fort and reutilized and adapted it for their own needs. Indeed, the process of re-adaptation seems to have been still in progress under the Chiaramonti well into the 14th century.¹² One must add, however, that the castle did occupy the highest part of the medieval front but there was only a small marginal drop between the two extremities, and this would have entailed little defensive advantage.

As a matter of fact, the qualities of the site are much more in keeping with the nature of a Byzantine military fort of the *pyrgokastellon* (πυργοκαστελλον) type. This, although housing the governor and his garrison, would not have been a castle in the true later sense of the word but a predominantly military establishment concerned primarily with defence rather than political control. The word is coined from *pyrgos*, Greek for tower, and *castellum*, Latin for fort and typifies a nodal strongpoint, similar to the Frankish keep but designed

to reinforce the weakest part of the enceinte as prescribed by Procopius.¹³ In the words of T. E. Lawrence, the Greeks put their keeps and castles 'where they were wanted, the Franks where they would be impregnable.'¹⁴ And truly, the southeast corner marked the most sensitive part of Mdina's enceinte, overlooking the ascending approaches from the surrounding plains up the Saqqajja. One can find an excellent parallel in the Castello Gioia del Colle in Apulia, founded by Richard Seneschal, brother of Robert Guiscard on a pre-existing Byzantine fort which was later enlarged by Roger II and rebuilt by Frederick II around 1230.

The Arabs on their part are traditionally ascribed with having begun the excavation of the main *fosse* that isolated the *castrum* from the rest of the mainland. Significant efforts to establish the ditch as an effective defensive feature, however, were still underway during the mid-15th century so the Arab intervention could not have involved much more than the exploitation of an existing natural depression.¹⁵ Indeed a study of the bedrock beneath the bastion walls does reveal a drop between the two extremities of the front in the direction of Greek's Gate. But apart from the presence of a few rounded walls towers, as depicted in early 16th century plans, there is very little else that can possibly point to their handiwork in the formation of the *castellu*. Arab preference was for citadels rather than castles - large fortified and turreted enclosures. Still, any available Byzantine *kastron* would have been readily utilised - witness the citadel of the fortress of Tripoli captured by the Spaniards in 1510.¹⁶

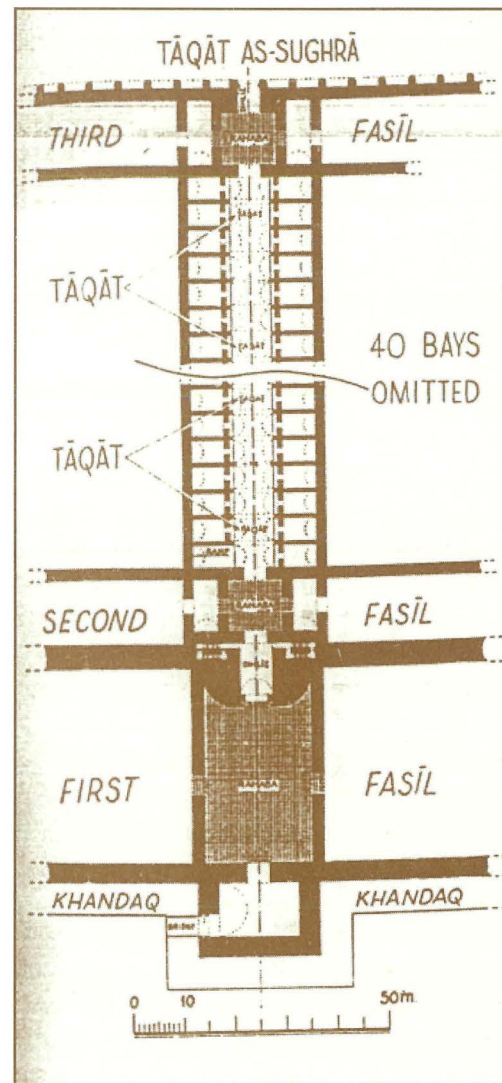
Arab influence in the development of the medieval fortifications of Mdina, however, can be traced in other elements. Documentary sources, for example, frequently mention the *fasil*.¹⁷ This is an Arabic word and the interpretation given to it in the local context, that of a mere low parapet, distracts from its true meaning. It is best described by K.A.C. Creswell, one of the leading authorities on early Muslim Architecture, as the space between two rampart walls. Creswell cites al-Khatib's description of the fortifications of Baghdad: '... the height of the inner wall, which was that of the city, was 35 cubits. On it were towers which rose 5 cubits above it.... then came the *fasil* between the two walls 60 cubits wide, finally the first (outer) wall, which was the wall of the *fasil*, and beyond was the *khandaq* (ditch)'.¹⁸

The *fasil*, therefore, was equivalent to the *intervallum*, the fighting space between two walls - the *currituri* quoted by Fiorini/Buhagiar.¹⁹ This definition holds important implications, for it immediately hints that Mdina, or at the least a considerable part of the town, was enclosed within a set of two walls - a common enough feature in the fortified towns of the period. In

other words, the Mdina ramparts consisted of a main wall, a *teichos* (τειχος), and a lower outer wall - the *proteichisma* (προτειχισμα) or *antemurale* - much better understood today as the *falsabraga* or *faussebraye*.²⁰ The definition of *fasil* as a 'fortified wall capped by a parapet' is, in my opinion not exact, and any reference to a low parapet (*parapetto basso*) as given in Amari's translation of at-Tijani,²¹ should be read as the low outer wall or *antemurale*, for a fortress dependent solely on a low parapet for its defence would have had very little chance of survival. The need for an *antemurale* was necessary to protect the base of the main wall itself, both as an added safeguard against mining and direct assault, and as a buffer against siege towers. Again, it finds its inspiration in Byzantine military architecture, particularly in the Theodosian walls of Constantinople. Actually, one of the best surviving examples of the system of double walls built during the 14th and early 15th centuries is to be found along the southern part of the enceinte of the Hospitaller fortress of Rhodes.²²

Fiorini/Buhagiar place the *fasil*, on the basis of their reading of the medieval documents, on the northern part of the enceinte in the Salvatur area, identifying the present raised *chemin-de-ronde* and embrasured parapet with the *fasil*.²³ There is no doubt that there was a *fasil* along this part of the enceinte but it is more likely, however, that this feature was enclosed by the present outer vertical wall and an inner secondary wall, as hinted by the massive block of solid masonry surviving inside the nearby *Beaulieu House*. It is also possible, on the other hand, that the *fasil* could have been outside the present vertical rampart for the French military engineer Charles François de Mondion, involved in the reconstruction of Mdina's fortifications in the early 18th century, records the presence of the remains of ancient outer walls at the foot of the northern ramparts, ... *quali vestigi non solamente si vedono nel detto fondo ma anche si distendono fin quasi il posto baccar dove s'attacano con il roccame che resta scoperto sotto le mura di essa Città*.²⁴

Mondion's report mentions that these *replicati vestigi di falsabraga*²⁵ (hence *antemurale*) spanned all the way from below D'Homedes Bastion - then being fitted out with a low battery - round to the Ta' Bacchar, or St. Mary Bastion overlooking Mtarfa. D'Aleccio's and Serbelloni's 16th century plans of Mdina ignore such detail, though they do indicate the antiquity of the town's main northern walls and their ruinous state. On the other hand, both clearly show a veritable stretch of *antemurale* and *fasil* on the main land front of Mdina to the south, stretching all the way from the *porta principale* down to the tower at Greeks Gate, interrupted solely by the presence of a large rectangular tower sited in the centre of the front. The presence of this outer wall is also borne out by the documentary information recently



The 'fasil' on the walls of the citadel of Baghdad - after K.A.C. Creswell

unearthed particularly where this mentions the advice of master builders Georgi Vassaldu and Georgi Dumag as to the dismantling of a *beloardo* (rampart) beneath the tower annexed to the property of Peri Caruana and its replacement with a scarped buttress wall.²⁶

The D'Aleccio and Serbelloni plans, actually provide the only convincing graphic clue to the planimetric layout of Mdina's medieval fortifications. These show the location of the town's four towers and double set of walls, the two gates and the remains of the castle itself. By the mid-16th century, however, the brunt of the town's defences had then come to rest on two new corner bastions begun during the reign of Grand Master D'Homedes even though much of the intervening medieval defensive elements were still intact. It was only the castle that was missing from the equation, its place taken over by the new magistral palace.

The disappearance of the medieval stronghold entails no enigma. It was pulled down by royal licence in response to local demand some time after 1453.²⁷ The excuse was not some Lacedemonian policy of not

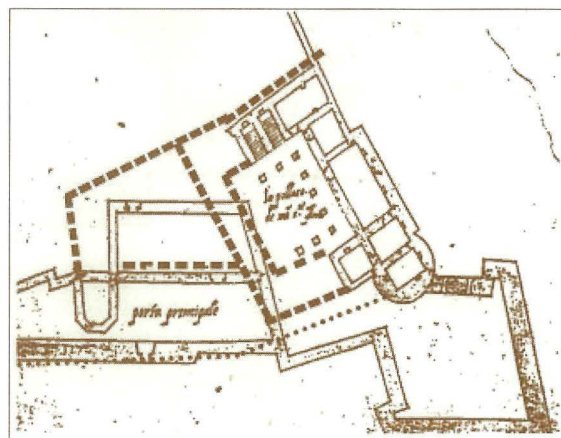
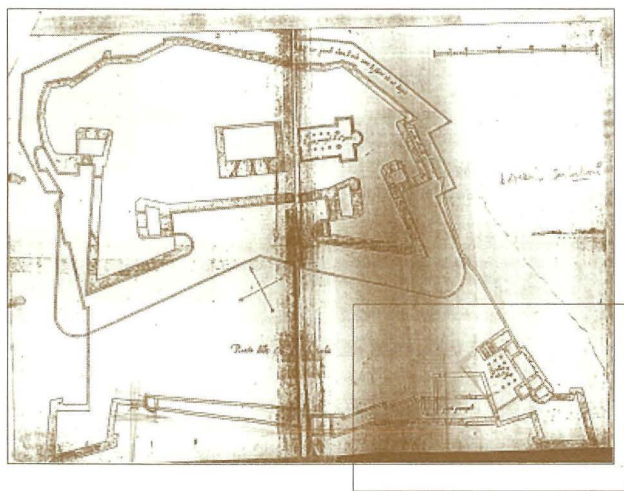
fortifying the place but that its old ruinous walls had become a public danger and, apparently, its upkeep a significant drain on the town's purse; possibly it had come to be a despised tool of tyrannical oppression, especially under the Chiaramonti. Evidently, as a work of fortification, it must have offered very little command and defensive advantage for the town elders to request its dismantling at a time when the Island had begun to attract the increasingly hostile attention of Barbary corsairs. Only some twenty years earlier, in 1429, a force of 18,000 men under Qâ'id Ridwân had invaded the island and all but captured the city after subjecting it to a siege.²⁸

Actually, the *Castellu dili Tyranni*²⁹ was only partially demolished since it was just the internal walls separating it from the town that were pulled down and the masonry used to repair the town ramparts and gate. The castle's outer ramparts and towers, which formed an integral part of the main enceinte, were obviously retained. In fact, that part of the castle which was embodied into the land front contained at least two towers and a gateway. Both are clearly indicated in 16th century plans. The tower to the left of the main gate (when seen from outside), was known as the *Turri Mastra*³⁰ and controlled the entrance and exit into the fortress - this structure was eventually replaced in the early 18th century by the *Torre dello Standardo* though this retained the original role as a watch-out/signalling post. The *Turri Mastra*, or *Turri dila bandiera*, seems to have been rectangular in plan

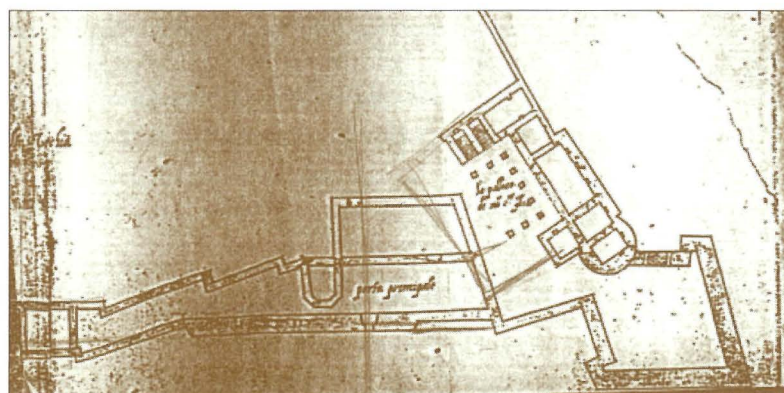
with a polygonal or semicircular front. Only in one late 17th century plan, very roughly executed, is it shown as having had a circular form.³¹

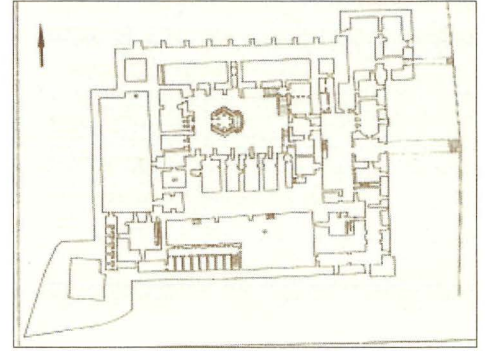
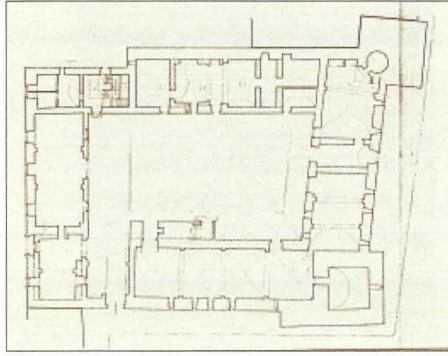
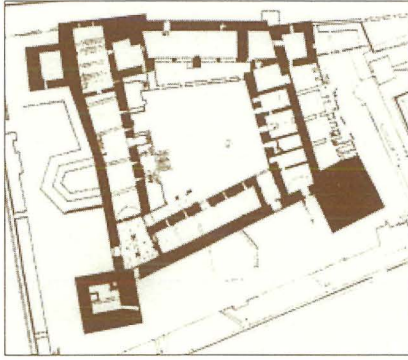
The tower to the right of the main gate occupied the south east extremity of the land front - the most sensitive part overlooking the approaches from Saqqajja. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the plans show it to have been the most solidly built of all the town's *turri*, having markedly thicker walls. In all likelihood this was the *Mastio*, the strong tower or keep of the *castellu* (see illustration p. 22). In the documents it is referred to as the *Turri di la Camera*³² - a faithful description when one sees how it was integrated with the adjoining palatial halls. By the 16th century this massive tower was linked to the magistral palace in a manner that still recalled a corner tower attached to a rectangular ward - the whole layout reminiscent of many rectangular Swabian castra erected by Frederick II in Apulia such as those of Bari, Gioa del Colle, Trani, Barletta and Monte Sant Angelo.³³

The palazzo built by L'Isle Adam after 1530, with its arched porch, seems to have occupied the undemolished east wing of the castle's ward, that part of the stronghold which must have served as the residential quarters of the *capitaneus civitatis*. This was probably achieved much in the same way that the Grand Master's other palace at the *Castrum Maris* replaced the former castellan's house there. Indeed, it appears that even as early as 1413, the Mdina stronghold was already serving



Detail from the 16th century plan of Mdina by Serbelloni, showing the remains of the medieval castle, then being used as a magistral palace, and adjoining fortifications





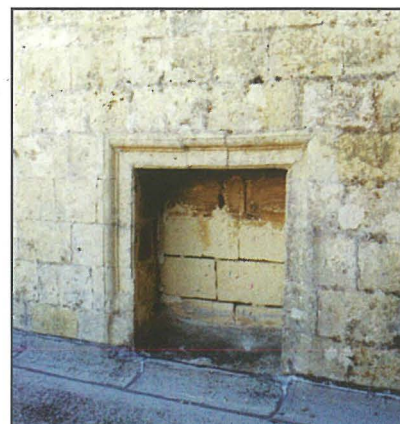
Above, plans of Swabian castles in Puglia, from left, Bari, Gioia del Colle and Trani (after S. Mola).

more as a captain's residence rather than for defensive purposes.³⁴ Vestiges of the facade of L'Isle Adam's new *pallaso*, seem to have actually survived within part of the courtyard rebuilt by the French Engineer Mondion in the 1720's as part of the remodelling of the Magistral Palace complex. The presence of a very thick wall, with blocked-up apertures and truncated windows having delicately moulded surrounds (see photographs) hint at the remains of a 16th century building. Indeed, the inner courtyard itself, remodelled by Mondion, seems to have respected the footprint of the old castral ward. It is not yet clear, however, if the vaulted rooms at ground level (the hospital kitchen) enveloping the courtyard, particularly those to the east and south - one of which is threatening to collapse - actually date back to 15th century or much later. What is clear from the contemporary plans is that L'Isle Adam's palace overlooked the courtyard, was fronted by an arcaded portico and was approached via the narrow street leading to the present day Xaghra Palace.

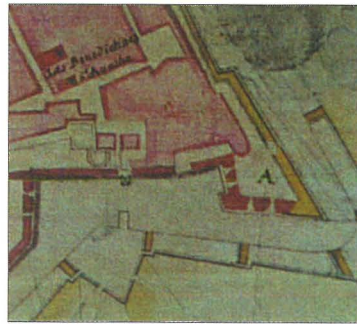
The rounded tower itself continued to feature in the plans of Mdina well into the early 1700s until the magistral palace was finally rebuilt by Mondion. Judging by the D'Aleccio/Serbelloni plans, the left flank of the D'Homedes bastion was actually grafted onto this tower. It remained visible until it was buried beneath a heavy buttress laid onto the outer wall at the foot of the magistral palace - an intervention which actually blocked-up one of the two embrasures in the same flank of the adjoining bastion itself.

Incidentally, this bastion, referred to in the documents as the *belguardo del Palacio*³⁵ and known as D'Homedes bastion is also a unique example of the early type of Italian bastion built in Malta. It may have been designed by the military engineer Antonio Ferramolino for it has now been shown that it was already under construction by 1547.³⁶ Undeniably, its most interesting feature is its little known continuous countermine gallery running parallel to the line of the outer walls, serving gun embrasures and sally-ports in the flanks, but mainly designed to help frustrate enemy mining activities given the clayish nature of the terrain on which the bastion was erected. Fitted with vertical and horizontal flues, the gallery was designed to dissipate the blast of an explosive mine fired beneath its walls. This feature is missing in the *belguardo dila Porta dili Grechi* on the opposite end of the land front, a bastion which was built many years later.

One other reason that was cited in favour of the demolition of the castle's inner walls in 1453, was the need to open up new public space for settlement by people from the surrounding countryside. However, if the castellated enclosure was merely restricted to the area of the present magistral palace, than this could not have possibly attracted many new residents. *Ergo*, the castle's inner walls may have extended further northwards towards the Cathedral, possibly in the form of a lesser ward. Initially, these may have even linked up with the *Rocca* recorded to have existed on the northern part of the town.³⁷ Still, the *Rocca*, evidence of which appears to have survived in a massive wall inside Beaulieu House, may more likely than not have



Left, Overall view and detail of window surround of the early facade of the magistral palace in Mdina surviving within the inner courtyard of the palatial complex.



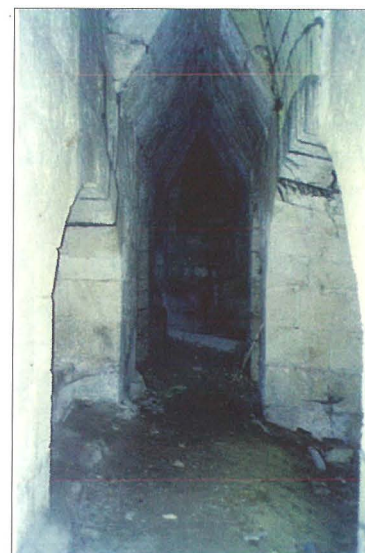
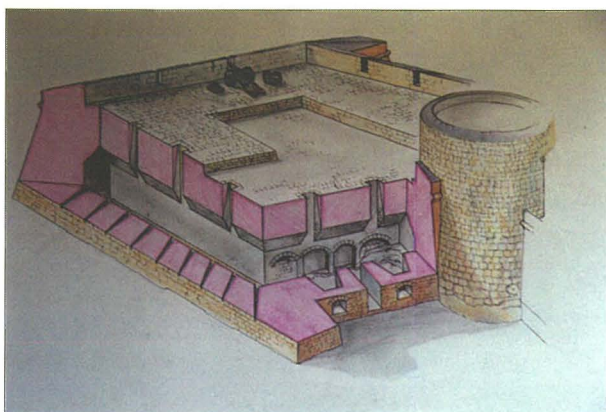
Details from three early 18th century plans showing the remains of the rounded wall-tower adjoining the magistral palace.

been a detached strong-point in its own right, as the definition of the word surely implies. In that case, however, it is difficult to explain the presence of a secondary stronghold within the perimeter of such a small fortified town as Mdina unless, of course, this was merely the vestige of some former, probably pre-medieval, fortified structure.

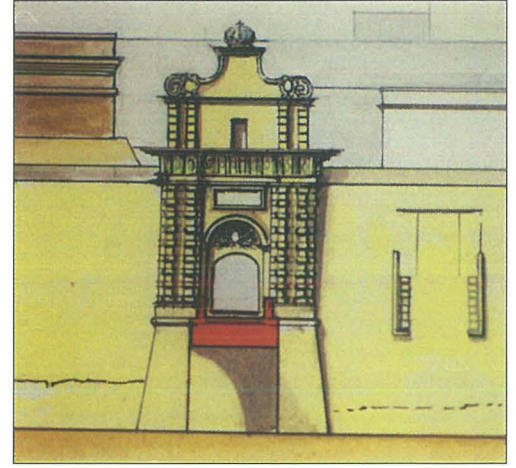
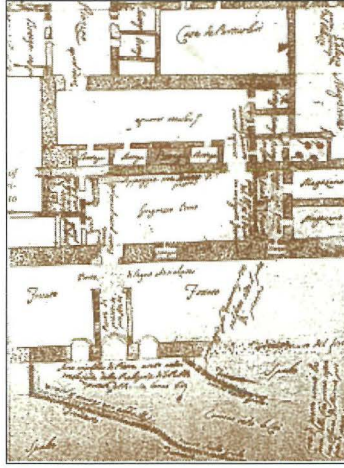
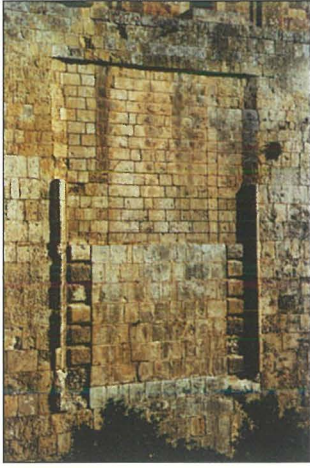
Recent excavations undertaken at Xaghra Palace, just outside the Magistral Palace to the north, have revealed the presence of solidly built perimeter walls, composed of large blocks of masonry, all dating to Roman or Punic times, but evidently re-laid in medieval times. Actually, nothing of the medieval ramparts along the east flank of Mdina seems to have survived above ground level for the old town walls were rebuilt *en cremaillere* by the Knights. The Order's resident military engineer, Blondel, writing in 1693, tells us that all that part of the town's perimeter *volta a gregale e levante sino al Palazzo suo magistrale ... fu rinovata tutta quella cortina dal Gran Maestro Omedes*.³⁸ By the late 17th century, however, many town houses had also encroached onto these walls such that direct access to the ramparts was not *possibile se non per di dentro alle case de particolari, non solo appoggiate ma attaccate, et alle quali serve elle di muro esterno* - the house of the Muscat family, for example, even had latrines, *gabinetti su l'orlo del bastione*.³⁹ All this was done to the detriment of the town's defences and in 1717 it was felt necessary to impose upon the Cannons of the Cathedral Chapter the condition that any new windows cut into the ramparts in the course of the rebuilding of the Archbishop's palace

had to be made *in forma di cannoniere capaci di ricevere canone secondo il bisogno*.⁴⁰ That part of the outer wall adjoining the magistral complex seems to have begun to suffer from serious subsidence of the ground soon after the Vilhena's palace was rebuilt in the early decades of the 18th century. As a result, it was found necessary to reinforce the wall with a large masonry buttress, *massiccia d'appoggio* - now itself peeling off.

Another substantial vestige of the medieval castle that survived well into the 18th century was the system of bent entrance into the town via three successive gates. This tortuous approach, designed primarily as a precaution against a *coup de main*, was a common defensive feature of medieval strongholds by the 13th century, but the concept finds its inspiration in the defence antecedents of the Muslim world. The three gates were separated by two courtyards (*ingresso primo* and *ingresso secondo*). The first of these courtyards, confined between the *Prima Porta Principale* (also known as *Porta di Santa Maria*)⁴¹ and the *Seconda Porta* was nothing more than the *intervallum* between the *antemurale* and main wall. This enclosure contained a small church of *Santa Maria della Porta*, an arched niche within the thickness of the wall containing an altar, and an arcaded loggia. The second courtyard, on the other hand, stretched awkwardly beyond the line of the walls into the town and seems to have been, as suggested by Fiorini & Buhagiar, merely an adaptation of part of



Cutaway drawing showing the countermine gallery served with vertical and horizontal flues and view of the countermine gallery where it ends at the two casemated gun embrasures in the north flank of the D'Homedes bastion.



Above, from l. to r., the old main gate into Mdina, plan of the bent-entrance approach into the town (Ms 60 Archives of the Mdina Cathedral) and elevation showing the relationship between the two gates.

the rooms and corridors of the castle after it was pulled down in 1453.⁴² So much so that it seems to have served mainly as a 'suq' with a number of *botteghe* cut into two of its walls.⁴³

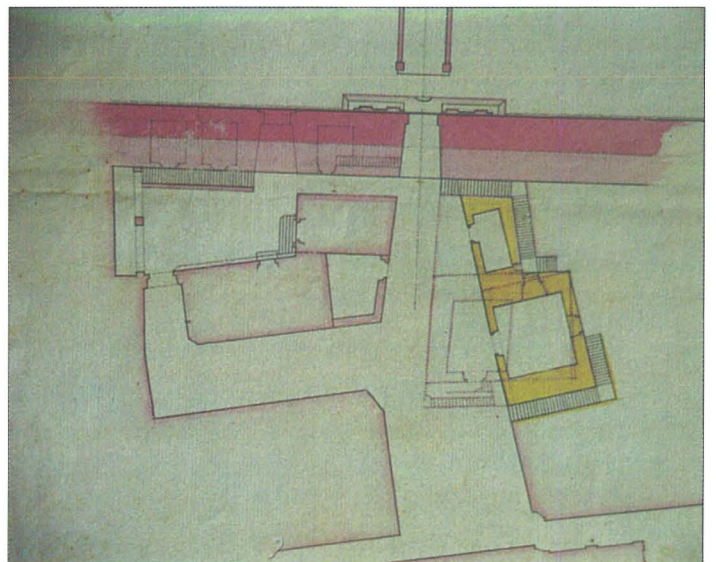
The gates themselves would have been of the type still to be seen at Greeks Gate, on the other end of the Mdina front - with a vaulted pointed arch of horseshoe profile. The present walled-up gate to the right of the main baroque entrance marks the exact site of the original medieval entrance but its boxed rectangular mouldings and rusticated pilasters indicate an early 17th century reconstruction. In 1527, the main gate was decorated with the coat-of-arms of *Sua Cesarea MaJestati*, carved in stone by *Maestro Jayme Balistre[ra]*.⁴⁴ Both the main entrance and Greeks Gate were served by wooden drawbridges approached over stone *ponti*. It is not possible to say what type of lifting mechanism was employed - Greeks Gate itself gives no such clue. The bascule type of drawbridge with wooden arms, however, was the most common type employed throughout the middle ages for its simple counterweight mechanism. The bascule was also much favoured throughout the 17th century and can still be seen at St. Thomas Tower in Marsascala. The lifting mechanism at Mdina definitely comprised the use of wooden beams, *bastaso che levao lu ponti*⁴⁵ and metal chains, for in 1527 a *cantaro di ferro* was purchased to produce the *catinj dilo ponti*. The drawbridges themselves were made from planks of oak⁴⁶ at one time brought purposely from Messina and judging by the entries in the records were continually in need of repair, particularly that at Greeks Gate.

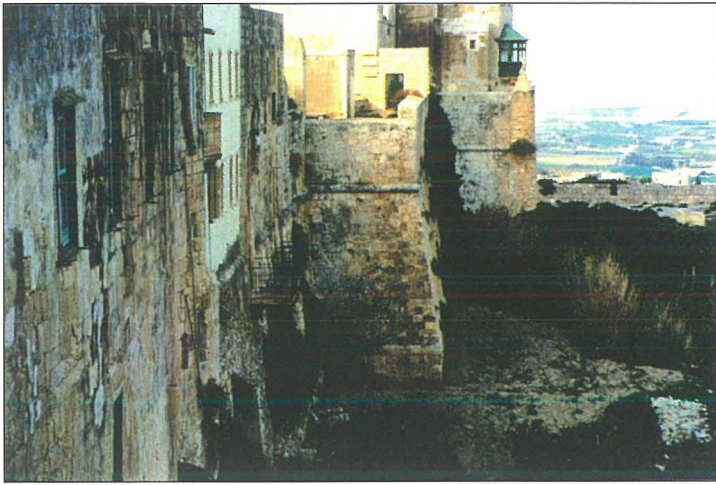
There also seem to have been posterns and sally ports for sorties and furtive getaways, but no vestiges have survived, as has remained, for example, on the medieval ramparts of the Cittadella in Gozo. Contrary to what has been stated, however, the written records do in fact allude to their existence. The *mandati* documents of 1527, for example, refer to the *porta falsa Jpsius civitatis* - *porta falsa* (or *falsa porta*) is a term used frequently to refer to sally-ports or posterns and is encountered even

on 18th century plans of the Order's fortifications.⁴⁷ Another entry in the *mandati* is even more specific, mentioning the need to wall up an exit into the ditch, *murari la porta dila putighia* (magazine) *che apri alo fossato*.⁴⁸

A most interesting feature of the Mdina fortifications, mentioned by Gian Frangisc Abela in 1647 was the presence of a barbican, a *Torrione forte di forma circolare con fosso e cisterna* that protected the far side of the bridge leading to the main gate.⁴⁹ Surprisingly, the medieval documents make no specific reference to this structure. Dr. Albert Ganado, however, citing the history of the Inguanes family revealed that this was built by Antonio Desguanecks sometime after 1448.⁵⁰ Giacomo Castaldi's map of Malta (1551), too, shows Mdina with a turreted barbican although the actual details must not be taken too seriously especially when other obvious landmarks are shown so confusingly in the same map. By the 15th century, barbicans were a standard component of most European castles - even the Gozo *Castrum* had one and this is illustrated in D'Aleccio's plan. It was also the convention to depict castral entities

Below, plan of the adjustments made to the old entrance into Mdina in the 1720's (NLM)





View of the stretch of walls rebuilt 'en cremaillere' by the Knights on the east flank of Mdina - note the windows cut into the ramparts. Right, Greeks Gate as seen from within



with such features. In any case we know that Mdina's barbican was actually dismantled in 1551 because it was then considered more of a liability than an asset to the city's defence⁵¹; presumably it was too small to serve as a *mezzaluna* in the age of gunpowder defences and must have obstructed the field of fire from the adjoining ramparts and the newly built D'Homedes bastion. An inventory of Mdina's artillery compiled by Mastro Giuilelmo⁵² in May 1560 does, however, mention the need to place cannon *a basso al fianco di Barbacana*. In this case however, the word 'barbacana' is referring to the bent entrance approach at the foot of the Torri dila Bandera rather than to the *tête de ponte* built in the mid-15th century since we know that the latter had already been demolished. For although etymologically deriving from the Arabic *bab khank* meaning gatehouse or gate-tower, the word was also frequently used to describe an antemural. Nonetheless, some sort of minor outerwork seems to have survived in the area, for in 1716 we read of the *muro che cinge il corpo di guardia avanti la porta*.⁵³

Little has survived to date of the original fabric of the medieval fortress of Mdina. The only indication of the true nature and texture of the castle's ramparts comes from the sole surviving section of medieval wall still to be seen at Greeks Gate. Apart from the vestiges of the gate itself with its pointed arch there is the adjoining stretch of vertical curtain wall some 3 metres thick and 10 metres in height. This wall is built mainly of coursed rubble-work with increasingly larger stone boulders in the lower courses, many of which appear to have been re-utilised from some earlier Roman, possibly Punic buildings, or ramparts. The practice of cannibalising ancient structures for their building materials is encountered throughout the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages. To mention one classic example, the fortress of Bodrum was built with material quarried from the site of the famous Mausoleon at Harlicarnassus. More evidence for the reuse of classical masonry in the

medieval ramparts of Mdina has also come up during archaeological excavations in Inguanez Street and Xaghra Palace. The site at Inguanez Street revealed that the old medieval town walls along the land front were constructed with much use of ancient masonry blocks. The walls of the ancient city, particularly in the Rabat area would have provided a good source of building material. In 1724, officials of the Università of Notabile could still write of the presence of a *pedamento di muro di pietra rustica* in the vicinity of Greeks Gate claiming that this wall was *quell'istesso che faceva circuito alla città che era grande fin il fosso di S. Paolo extra muros: il già detto muro continuava per sopra Ghariexem e passa da diversi luochi*.⁵⁴

It is difficult to reconcile the texture of the surviving remains with the many references to the repeated use of *cantuni* and *balati* employed in the repair and maintenance of the ramparts throughout the 15th and early 16th centuries, since the latter imply walls of more regular ashlar construction such as can be still seen on the projecting rounded wall-tower on Mdina's north wall. Even then, the outer masonry shell of this remnant of a medieval wall tower could actually date to much later Hospitaller times when most of the old walls had to be rebuilt. In 1693, for example, Blondel was still effecting repairs to *l'anticaglie spolpate e dal tempo smosse, e consumate all'esterno*.⁵⁵

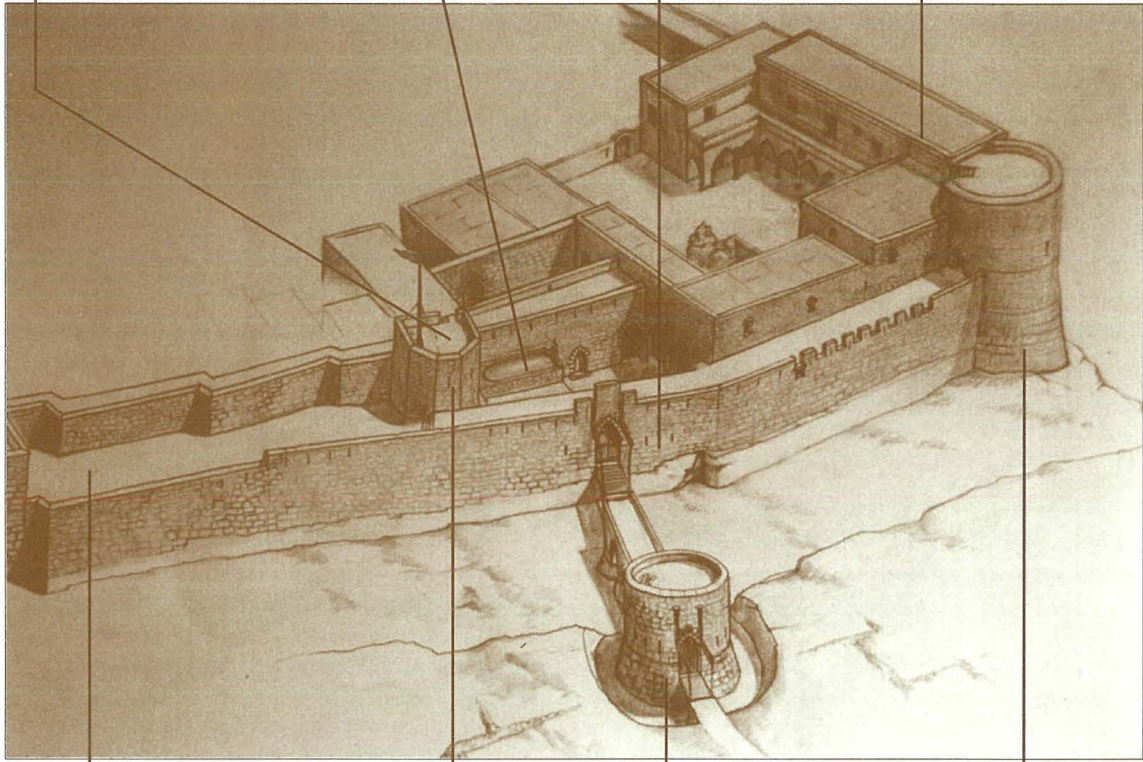
Of crenellations, drop boxes, machicolations, arrow-slits, loopholes and gun loops there is no specific hint, neither in the documents nor in the surviving physical remains. However, as a veritable fortress, the ramparts of Mdina would surely have been fitted with many such features. But these, having crowned the crest of the ramparts would have been the first to disappear. If the generous use of well-built *galleriji tal-mishun* on the Gauci tower erected in the first half of the 1500s by the Captain of the Naxxar militia is anything to go by, then *piombatoi* seem to have been a regular adjunct of local defences

The second courtyard of the system of bent entrance leading into the town - this was lined with shops and magazines built into the thickness of the ramparts.

Church of Sta. Maria della Porta situated within the first courtyard, or intervallum, of the system of bent entrance leading into the town.

Main Gate into Mdina (referred to in one document as Porta Santa Maria) - this was served by a wooden drawbridge.

L'Isle Adam's Palace built on the site of the old castle and probably occupying one wing of the old castral ward - shown in 16th cent. plans as having been fronted by an arcaded portico and rectangular courtyard.



The 'fasil' or open passage between the *antemurale* and the main wall - shown clearly in the Serbelloni and D'Aleccio plans

Torre Mastra or Torre dila Bandiera, guarding entrance into Mdina. This tower mounted a flag-pole and was used for relaying signals to the coastal watch-posts

The Barbican or *Torrione* built around 1448 to protect the entrance into the town. Abela mentions that it was of circular form and surrounded by its own ditch and was demolished in 1551

The 'Mastio' of the medieval castle of Mdina, as shown attached to the Magistral palace in the Serbelloni and D'Aleccio plans. Possibly the 'Torre dila camera' mentioned in the documents

and must have punctuated the ramparts of the island's main fortress with similar ease, particularly in the vicinity of gateways. The presence of similar box-machicolous on other towers around the island, particularly at Birchircara and Qrendi (Torri Cavalieri), built well into the 16th century, also reflects an insular tendency towards technological drag despite the introduction and widespread use of firearms. The Gozo Citadel too retained various elements that hint likewise although we know that the cause in this case was the Order's reluctance to invest in its re-fortification.

The Gauci tower also provides unique examples of cruciform slits cut in the faces of the machicolation for use with crossbows. By the early 16th century, Mdina's garrison contained both *balistrieri* and *scopetieri* and its parapets would have been required to provide the necessary facilities for its defenders. Cannon too became an important element in its defence. The documents reveal the presence of many *bombardi* by the late 15th century. Around that time, these guns would still have been mounted on low static *cippi* and

cavalcature which required apertures, or gun loops, cut low in the parapets in order for the guns to be fired. By 1522, however, the parapets of the fortress may even have begun to be fitted with embrasures to take more modern cannon such as the *columbina* (culverin) mentioned in the *mandati* and others types mounted on carriages with *loru roti*.⁵⁶

Despite the increasing reliance on gunpowder artillery for its defence, the fortress of Mdina was still predominantly a medieval stronghold geared towards a medieval form of warfare at the time of the coming of the Knights to Malta in 1530. It remained so, well into the 16th century and only really shed its medieval skin in the early decades of the 18th century when its ramparts, and a large part of its public and private buildings were practically rebuilt anew during the reign of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena. The extensive nature of that rebuilding programme has meant that very little of the old fortress has survived above ground. The graphic reconstruction of the of Mdina's medieval ramparts presented here is based on the elements

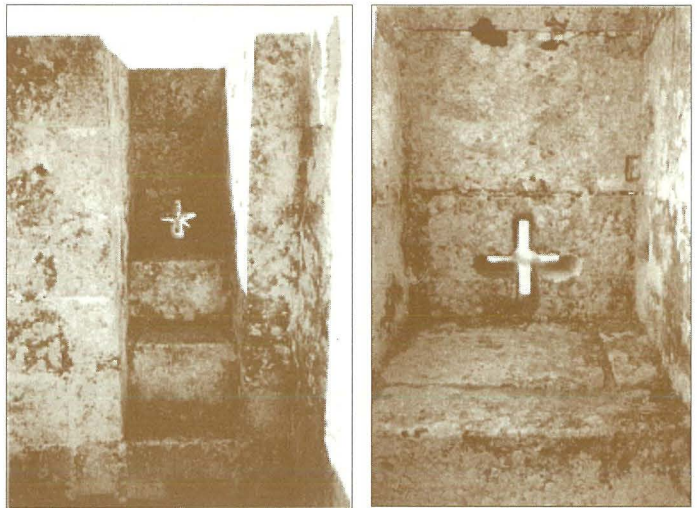
discussed above and shows the fortifications as these may have stood in the late 15th and early 16th centuries prior to the arrival of the Order in Malta.

Author's Note

I would like to thank Mr Nathaniel Cutajar B.A. (Hons) Archaeology M.A. for his help, guidance, and encouragement in the preparation of this paper, and with whom I also had many opportunities to discuss this subject at length. Some of the ideas presented here actually owe their origin to Mr Cutajar himself and I hope that he will be developing these further through the course of his own specialised studies in the medieval archaeology of Mdina. I am also grateful to Mr Paul Saliba B.A. (Hons) Archaeology, for drawing my attention to certain archaeological and historical facts, the existence of various old texts and other relevant information.

References

- ¹ Archivio di Stato di Palermo RC 49, f. 51 as quoted in Fiorini & Buhagiar, *The defence and Fortifications of Mdina in Mdina the Cathedral City*, vol. II, p. 443 (Malta - 1996).
- ² Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit. 2 Vols.
- ³ Gio. Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*, p. 31 (Malta - 1647).
- ⁴ Giliberto Abbate's report of c.1241, quoted in Luttrell A., 1992 and note 1 *supra*.
- ⁵ Monreal Y Tejada, L., *Medieval Castles of Spain*, p.16 (Madrid - 1999).
- ⁶ Acta Juratorum, doc. 10 (1540) as quoted in Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p. 443.
- ⁷ Bonanno A., *Roman Malta*, pp.19-21 (Formia - 1992).
- ⁸ A natural defensive site used as a refuge place in times of danger, see Winter, F.E., *Greek Fortifications*, p. 16 & footnote 65 pp. 31-32 (Canada - 1971).
- ⁹ Azzopardi, G., *Papers in Maltese Linguistics*, p.216 (Malta -1970): 'Arabic 'almadina' is the principal city, the city held in highest regard.' Other cities bearing the same name are MEDINA (Caccaino & Castronuovo, Palermo, and Badajoz, Cadiz & Valladoid in Spain), ALMEDINA (Cuidad Real), ALMEDINILLA (Cordoba), ALMUDINA (Alicante), MADINA (Guipuzcoa); Cagion de Azevedo, *The 1970 Campaign in Missione Archaeologica a Malta, Campagna di Scavi 1970*, p.103 (Rome - 1973); '... and manifestations even in the late Roman and Byzantine ages, not only in connection with the church ... but also with fortifications and defensive works, particularly M21, M26, M27, M34 which take us back to the age of the Arab conquest and testify that it did not happen in one moment, but rather that it concluded a long series of decades of war'.
- ¹⁰ Al-Himyarî first referred to Mdina as an ancient city inhabited by the Byzantines. In the year 225 (870 AD) the Arabs under Sawada Ibn Muhammad captured the fortress of Malta and demolished it, dismantling many buildings and carrying away the stones to build a castle in Susa. Thereafter the island remained practically uninhabited for some 180 years and was only re-



Detail of a piombatoi at Torri Gauci, showing cruciform crossbow slit

peopled by the Arabs in the year 440 (1048-49 AD) who rebuilt its city to make it 'a finer place than it was before', Brincat, J.M, *Malta, 870-1054: Al-Himyarî's Account*, p.11 (Malta - 1991). The Muslim cemetery within the Roman town-house is post 1090 AD, i.e. it dates to after the plunder of the Maltese islands by Count Roger, Trump, D., *Malta, An Archaeological Guide*, p.23 (London - 1972).

- ¹¹ Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p. 444.
- ¹² *ibid*.
- ¹³ Procopius of Caesarea, *Buildings*, ii. 5,8-9, ed. J. Haury p. 38 (Leipzig - 1913), translated by H.B. Dewing; London 1940, cited in T.E. Lawrence, *Crusader Castles* p. 27 (Oxford - 1990 edit) edited by Denys Pringle.
- ¹⁴ Lawrence, op.cit., pp.26-27.
- ¹⁵ Archives of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Misc. 437 cited in Fiorini & Buhagiar p.458.
- ¹⁶ Messana G., *La Medina di Tripoli* in *Quaderni Dell'Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Tripoli*, p. 16 (Roma - 1979); Rossi, E., *Storia di Tripoli e Della Tripolitania Dalla Conquista Araba al 1911*, p. 26 (Roma - 1968)
- ¹⁷ Wettinger, G., *The Jews in Malta in the Late Middle Ages*, p. 16 (Malta - 1985).
- ¹⁸ Creswell, K.A.C., *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, p.231, (Scolar Press - 1989 ed. revised and supplemented by James W. Allen).
- ¹⁹ Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.450.
- ²⁰ Lawrence, T.E., op.cit., pp.27-29 : (Oxford - 1990 edit) edited by Denys Pringle; Gabriel, A., *La Cité de Rhodes*, p. 133 (Paris - 1921).
- ²¹ Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., foot note 30.
- ²² Gabriel, op.cit, pp. 122-133; Spiteri, S.C., *Fortresses of the Cross - Hospitaller Military Architecture*, pp. 77-81 (Malta - 1994).
- ²³ Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.452.
- ²⁴ National Library of Malta, University of Notabile, Ms. 187 f.76 (1724).
- ²⁵ *ibid*.
- ²⁶ National Library Of Malta, University of Notabile, Ms. 12, f.48 (4.xi.1513) mentioned in Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.446: For the Serbelloni plan see Ganado, A., *Sixteenth Century Manuscript Plan of Mdina by Gabrio Servelloni in Mdina and the Earthquake of 1693* ed. by J. Azzopardi, pp.77-83 (Malta - 1993).

- ²⁷ Abela, op.cit., p.31; for a more detailed evaluation of this aspect see Fiorini & Buhagiar pp.443-445.
- ²⁸ Mifsud 1918-19.
- ²⁹ Archives of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Misc. 27 as cited in Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.445.
- ³⁰ Mifsud, A., *La Milizia e Le Torri Antiche in Malta*, extracted from Archivum Melitense, p.17 (Malta - 1920).
- ³¹ Cathedral Museum Mdina - Cathedral Archives MS.60.
- ³² Archives of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Ms. 737 f.363 as quoted in Mifsud, p. 17.
- ³³ For more information on Swabian castles in Italy see *Itinerari Federiciani in Puglia - Viaggio nei castelli e nelle dimore di Federico II in Svevia*, edited by Cosimo Damiano Fonseca, (Bari - 1997).
- ³⁴ Archivio di Stato di Palermo RC 49, f.51 as cited in Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.443.
- ³⁵ Archives of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Misc. 441, Quire B, ff.1-32 quoted in Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.466 - NLM Univ. Ms. 84, ff.366-636.
- ³⁶ National Library of Malta, University Ms. 13, f. 356.
- ³⁷ Wettinger 1982-87; documentary references to 'Rocca' are discussed in more detail in Fiorini & Buhagiar pp. 450-452.
- ³⁸ National Library of Malta, Archives of the Order of St. John (A.O.M.) 1016, f. 157 (21 February 1693).
- ³⁹ A.O.M. 1016, f.480 (24 May 1701).
- ⁴⁰ A.O.M. 1017, f.90 (1717).
- ⁴¹ A.O.M. 1016 f. 157.
- ⁴² Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.447.
- ⁴³ Cathedral Museum Mdina - Cathedral Archives MS.60.
- ⁴⁴ Fiorini, S., *The 'Mandati' Documents at the Archives of the Mdina Cathedral, Malta 1473-1539*, Mandati 2, f.262, p. 103 (Malta - 1992).
- ⁴⁵ ibid., Mandati 3, f.691, p.175.
- ⁴⁶ ibid., Mandati 3, f.623, (1538) p.170.
- ⁴⁷ ibid., Mandati 2, 160 (1527), p. 96; for definition of *porta falsa* see G. Grassi *Dizionario Militare Italiano* p. 392 (Naples - 1835), '*porticciucola, piccola porta munita d'un rastrello di ferro, fatta nel mezzo delle cortine, o sul angolo di esse, o vicino agli orrecchioni, per andar liberamente e fuori della visita del nemico dalla piazza alle opere esteriori*'. The term *Porta del Soccorso* was also used to describe a sally-port.
- ⁴⁸ ibid., Mandati 3, f.533 (1538), p.163.
- ⁴⁹ Abela., op.cit., p.29.
- ⁵⁰ Ganado, A., book review of '*Mdina, the Cathedral City of Malta*' in *the Times of Malta* (Wednesday 4 December 1996) p.21.
- ⁵¹ Abela., op.cit., p.29.
- ⁵² Archives of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Misc.34, ff.682v-3, cited in Mifsud, op.cit., p. 17 and Fiorini & Buhagiar, op.cit., p.474.
- ⁵³ A.O.M. 1017, f. 41 (1716).
- ⁵⁴ National Library of Malta, University Ms. Vol. 187, f. 81 (1724).
- ⁵⁵ A.O.M. 1016, f.157.
- ⁵⁶ Fiorini, op.cit., Mandati 1, f. 283b, p. 190; Mandati 3, f. 687v, p.199.

Pasti Rituali nella Malta Punica

Alessandro Quercia

*Il vasellame da fuoco nei contesti sacri e funerari
in ricordo della prof.ssa Ciasca*

Uno dei fenomeni che caratterizzano le società antiche è il consumo di cibo in particolari occasioni quali i banchetti in onore di divinità nell'ambito di santuari, e quelli che accompagnavano la sepoltura dei propri cari da parte dei parenti. Si tratta di un argomento estremamente complesso che può essere affrontato sotto vari punti di vista (antropologico, economico, socio-politico, etc...) intimamente connessi tra di loro in un moderno studio di carattere interdisciplinare. Nell'ambito specificatamente archeologico la documentazione utilizzabile nella ricostruzione di pratiche alimentari risulta essere di molteplice natura; dalle fonti letterarie ed epigrafiche a quella iconografica, dall'analisi architettonica e funzionale di strutture connesse allo studio della documentazione mobile rinvenuta in depositi archeologici, quali il vasellame per la preparazione, la cottura e il consumo del cibo e i resti organici.

Per alcune civiltà antiche c'è un'ampia letteratura, anche se la documentazione disponibile non è stata sempre utilizzata in tutte le sue potenzialità informative. Ad esempio negli studi sulla religione greca, si è sviluppata una "scuola", quella francese, che attraverso l'attenta lettura della ceramica figurata, oltre che delle fonti epigrafiche e letterarie, ha ricostruito in maniera organica i vari passaggi del sacrificio cruento: preparazione all'atto, uccisione e macellazione dell'animale, divisione e cottura delle carni, consumo di esse (Detienne-Vernant 1982). Questo approccio, di natura antropologica ed etnografica, ha di fatto trascurato la documentazione archeologica rinvenuta all'interno dei contesti sacri.

Nell'ambito fenicio-punico, invece, scarse sono le ricerche mirate a questa problematica (ad esempio Amadasi Guzzo 1988 e Rathje 1991). Questo dipende essenzialmente dalla oggettiva frammentarietà della documentazione testuale ed iconografica a disposizione, ma anche da una preponderante attenzione degli archeologi verso tematiche inerenti l'architettura e la caratterizzazione delle divinità piuttosto che verso la ricostruzione di pratiche e riti all'interno di un determinato contesto sacro (se si eccettua il caso dei *tofet*, in particolare quelli di Tharros e Mozia).

Oggetto di questo contributo è il vasellame utilizzato per la cottura del cibo e la sua presenza in contesti sacri e funerari nella Malta punica. Si tratta di una classe ceramica ben definita per caratteristiche tecniche

dell'argilla, che deve essere adatta all'esposizione al fuoco, ma spesso trascurata dalla letteratura archeologica; solo negli ultimi anni, essa ha ricevuto, soprattutto nell'ambito greco-romano, un'attenzione adeguata alle sue potenzialità informative per l'aspetto tecnologico e funzionale (Bats 1988; Olcese 1993). A causa della complessità dell'argomento e della brevità dello spazio a disposizione sono qui presentati solo alcuni elementi che ci paiono utili per stimolare una discussione su questa problematica; d'altronde, come sottolineato in precedenza, uno studio delle pratiche alimentari non può esaurirsi all'analisi di una sola componente (in questo caso la ceramica da fuoco) ma deve essere inserito in un'ottica molto più ampia.

Cucinare per gli dei: il caso di Tas-Silġ

Nel noto complesso santuarioale individuato nei pressi di Marsaxlokk dalla *Missione Archeologica Italiana* (Cagiano De Azevedo 1964-1973), e attualmente ancora oggetto di scavi da parte della stessa, un buon numero dei materiali mobili rinvenuti in esso è costituito dalla ceramica da fuoco.¹ Il materiale proviene principalmente dagli scarichi votivi dell'area Sud ma anche, in misura minore, dall'area Nord, nei depositi formati all'interno dei *sacrificial precincts* 38 e 4 (Ciasca 1993)². Caratteristica peculiare del vasellame da fuoco di Tas-Silġ è la presenza, in un numero relativamente limitato di esemplari, di iscrizioni dedicatorie ad Astarte, realizzate prima della cottura del vaso, che sembrano confermare il diretto uso nelle pratiche cultuali del santuario di tali recipienti (in ultimo Amadasi Guzzo 1993). In questo contributo non è possibile, ovviamente, né presentare il catalogo completo di forme e tipi, né problematiche di carattere metodologico nella classificazione; ci si limiterà soltanto a qualche tipo particolarmente diagnostico per la sua frequenza³.

Da una quantificazione delle 5 forme funzionali individuate,

Forma	n° di frammenti pertinenti
A-olla	603
B-pentola	900
C-tegami	106
D-teglie	409
E-coperchi	11

si evidenzia come quasi due terzi della ceramica da fuoco sia riconducibile a recipienti chiusi e profondi, adatti a lunghe bolliture di cibi solidi e semisolidi. Il fondo risulta nella maggior parte dei casi bombato rendendo necessario l'utilizzo di supporti per la cottura che

separavano i recipienti dal diretto contatto con la fiamma; la presenza di questi *focula* è attestata a Tas-Silġ anche se in un numero molto limitato (sei in tutto). I tegami e le teglie sono invece forme aperte e poco profonde, utilizzate verosimilmente per la cottura a secco o con olio. In particolare le teglie (fig. 4), presentano un fondo piatto, la cui superficie interna è spesso lisciata e lucidata, per evitare che il cibo si attaccasse ad essa; la loro imboccatura molto ampia fa ritenere che esse venissero usate per cuocere focacce o pani o tostare il grano, anche se non si deve escludere che fossero utilizzati semplicemente i forni.

Tra le olle, caratterizzate da un orlo quasi sempre privo di battente per l'appoggio del coperchio, due sono i tipi più documentati (oltre il 90% della totalità dei frammenti), entrambi realizzati con un impasto grossolano verosimilmente di produzione maltese, come testimonia la presenza di inclusi di calcare globigerinico. Il primo tipo (A1 della classificazione; fig. 1) con orlo a tesa orizzontale od obliqua e corpo ovoidale privo di anse, non trova confronti nel resto del Mediterraneo; è quindi difficile proporre una cronologia precisa, anche se la sua diffusione sembra essere preponderante in età ellenistica. Il secondo tipo (A10; fig. 2), caratterizzato da un corpo troncoconico ed orlo indistinto, prese a linguetta rettangolare e fondo piatto, è sempre realizzato a mano. I recipienti maltesi trovano confronti puntuali con esemplari provenienti da contesti funerari arcaici e tardo-arcaici della Sicilia (Tamburello 1969), ma il loro arco cronologico sembra essere molto più ampio, dato che nella stessa Malta compare ancora in livelli tardo romani e bizantini (nell'insediamento di Hal Millieri; Blagg-Bonanno-Luttrell 1988, pp. 66-69, nn. 123 e 127). La stretta analogia con gli esemplari siciliani fa pensare ad una comune tradizione formale di riferimento per questo tipo, forse di origine preistorica. Anche le teglie, realizzate a mano con impasto ricco di inclusi calcarei, sembrano potersi ricondurre ad una tradizione locale di origine preistorica..

Sono inoltre praticamente assenti nel santuario maltese (4 frammenti in tutto riconducibili ai tipi A8-9 della classificazione) i *cooking pots* con unica ansa ad occhiello, attestati nella stragrande maggioranza degli insediamenti fenicio-punici del Mediterraneo Centrale ed Occidentale, nelle fasi arcaiche di VIII-VII sec. a.C. (Vidal González 1996, pp. 73-74); non credo che questo dipenda dalla scarsa documentazione di livelli arcaici a Tas-Silġ, dato che lo scarico Sud contiene anche le attestazioni più antiche delle fasi storiche del santuario.

Le pentole sono recipienti meno profondi, ma con imboccatura più larga e maggiormente articolata per la presenza di un appoggio per il coperchio; l'impasto è decisamente più depurato rispetto a quello delle olle, ma sembra essere sempre di produzione maltese (a parte

rari frammenti non locali). Si tratta di una forma riconducibile alla tradizione greca (la *κοκκώβη* attestata dalle fonti) prodotta a partir dalla seconda metà del VI sec. a.C., ma diffusa nei contesti punici solo dalla seconda metà del V sec. a.C.. Gli esemplari di Tas-Silġ sono tutti da collocare tra la prima metà/metà del IV sec. e la metà del II sec. a.C.; alcuni tipi (come il B5; fig. 3) trovano confronti estremamente puntuali con esemplari provenienti dalle poleis magnogreche (Locri, Sibari, Caulonia, Laos e Poseidonia) e della Sicilia. Un dato estremamente interessante è costituito dalla presenza delle iscrizioni ad Astarte soltanto sugli esemplari appartenenti a questa forma (e in misura minore sui tegami, sempre di tradizione greca); non sono attestate sui tipi riconducibili alla tradizione formale maltese. L'introduzione delle dediche votive ad Astarte, realizzate a crudo e quasi in maniera seriale non solo su determinati recipienti, ma anche su determinati tipi morfologici, fa ipotizzare da una parte una produzione espressamente per scopi cultuali, dall'altra processi di trasformazione che forse hanno coinvolto anche le pratiche alimentari. Comunque non sembra assistersi ad un fenomeno di sostituzione; le olle e le teglie compaiono negli scarichi dell'area Sud insieme alle più elaborate pentole di tradizione greca.

Le dimensioni non particolarmente capienti del vasellame, soprattutto quello utilizzato per la bollitura, fanno pensare alla cottura di piccole porzioni per modesti nuclei familiari che partecipavano alle cerimonie nel santuario (come nel caso del santuario di Demetra e Kore a Corinto: Bookidis 1993, pp. 53-55). Il cibo cotto doveva consistere tradizionalmente in carne proveniente dai sacrifici, testimoniata dai resti osteologici nei depositi archeologici, ma non si deve escludere anche il consumo di pappe di cereali (Catone ci ricorda, ad esempio, la ricetta della *puls punica*; *De re rustica*, 85) convenzionalmente considerate alimento di ambito privato e non sacro; in alcuni contesti sacri (ancora il santuario di Corinto: Bookidis 1993, pp. 54-55) i resti osteologici sono scarsi, nonostante la preponderanza di forme da fuoco adatte per la bollitura e compare anche un certo numero di mortai utilizzati per macinare i cereali, come anche nel caso di Tas-Silġ. Cereali erano sicuramente utilizzati per la preparazione di focacce, cotte nelle ampie teglie; possiamo pensare, per adesso nei termini di una semplice suggestione, all'esistenza di panificatori e panettieri all'interno del santuario o assoldati da questo, come nel caso del tempio di Astarte citato dall'iscrizione del IV sec. a.C. rinvenuta a Kition (Amadasi Guzzo-Karagheorghis 1977, pp. 103-126).

Cucinare per i morti: la documentazione funeraria

Mentre nel caso del vasellame da fuoco di Tas-Silġ lo studio è già avviato da due anni, per quanto riguarda la documentazione nelle tombe maltesi esso è stato appena iniziato e quindi questa parte del contributo risulta essere

più che altro una relazione sui “lavori in corso”; l’obiettivo della ricerca, in stretta collaborazione con il *National Museum of Archaeology* de La Valletta, è quella di un *survey* all’interno dei magazzini per il riconoscimento e l’analisi dei *cooking pots*. Duplice è lo scopo della ricerca; da una parte si intende chiarire il reale uso di questi recipienti, in associazione alla funzione (anche simbolica) degli altri materiali del corredo e ai caratteri della sepoltura, dall’altra si vuole definire in maniera più puntuale la loro datazione in modo da avere una seriazione cronologica utile anche per i contesti non funerari.

Si è ritenuto necessario, come punto di partenza, fornire un quadro complessivo della documentazione sulla base della lettura dei *Museum Annual Reports* (abbreviati in seguito M.A.R.), delle poche pubblicazioni di tombe e dell’archivio fotografico ancora inedito. Dalla tabella sottostante, si possono ricavare alcune riflessioni di carattere tipologico e cronologico, in rapporto anche al materiale di Tas-Silg:

1) Il cosiddetto *cooking pot* di tradizione fenicio-punica, chiamato convenzionalmente “cup with handle” (nn. 1-9) risulta essere attestato soltanto nei contesti arcaici di VII-VI sec. a.C. Si tratta di recipienti di modeste dimensioni, con altezza e diametro dell’orlo in genere inferiori ai 10 cm, e impasto grossolano; la presenza di recipienti da fuoco di piccole dimensioni è frequente

nei corredi delle tombe, non solo in ambito fenicio-punico, ma anche in ambito greco (chiamati χυτρίδια: Sparkes-Talcott 1970, p. 224). Questa forma ridotta non sembra essere presente a Tas-Silg.

2) L’olla tipo A1 compare con sicurezza solo in due contesti (chiamata “caccabium”; nn. 10 e 14). La cronologia è piuttosto vaga, almeno nel caso della tomba di Birkirkara, dove sono presenti più deposizioni e quindi non si è in grado di associare l’olla al corredo corrispondente; ci sono brocche ed un’urna probabilmente di VI-V sec. a.C., una Maña D di età ellenistica, alcune coppe in pareti sottili e sigillata (imitazioni ?) del I sec. d.C. Ma questo tipo di olla non è attestata nei corredi arcaici. In altri tre casi (nn. 11-13) si accenna a “caccabium”, ma non si è in grado di definire con sicurezza la sua forma. È da notare che è il Caruana (1899, p. 37, tav. XV, fig. 21-22) a parlare di *caccabus*¹ per questo tipo di olla; quindi è possibile che successivamente sia stato mantenuto questo termine per indicare lo stesso tipo di recipiente. Comunque a differenza dei *cooking pots* arcaici, l’olla compare nelle tombe con dimensioni simili a quelle dei recipienti di Tas-Silg (13-29 cm di diametro, intorno ai 15-20 cm di altezza).

Dalla tabella circostante

N°	Forma/tipo	Provenienza	Collocazione del recipiente	Datazione della tomba	Bibliografia
1	olle tipo A8-9 (2 esemplari)	Buskett, località "il Gebel"	non conosciuta	età arcaica	M.A.R. 1934-5, p. X ("cups with handles")
2	olla tipo A8-9	Buskett, a sud di Palazzo Verdala	associata al corredo	età arcaica (riusata ?)	M.A.R. 1937-8, p. III ("cup")
3	olla tipo A8-9	Kallilia	associata al corredo	età arcaica	M.A.R. 1913-14, p. 6 ("dish with handle"?)
4	olla tipo A8-9 (3 esemplari)	Mtarfa, località Is-sandar	associate al corredo	età arcaica	Culican 1982, p. 73, 77-78, fig. 13
5	olla tipo A8-9 (2 es.)	Rabat, Gnien Fieres	associate al corredo	età arcaica	M.A.R. 1937-8, p. IV ("cups with handles")
6	olla tipo A8-9 (4 es.)	Rabat, Ghajn Qajjed	associate al corredo	età arcaica	Baldacchino-Dunbabin 1953, p. 36, fig. 4, E1-2 ("single-handled cups")
7	olla tipo A8-9 (3 es)	Rabat, Ghajn Izghir	associate al corredo	età arcaica	Culican 1970, p. 7, fig. 2b
8	olla tipo A8-9 (2 es.)	Tal Ghalia	associate al corredo	età arcaica	M.A.R. 1910-1, p. 6 ("small clay jug" ?)
9	olla tipo A8-9 (15 es.)	sconosciuta	sconosciuta	età arcaica ?	Vidal Gonzales 1996, pp. 35-39
10	olla tipo A1	Birkirkara, Fleur-de-Lis Road	associata al corredo	VI/V sec. a.C. -I d.C.	M.A.R. 1950-1, p. II ("caccabium")
11	olla tipo A1 (?)	Kallilia	rinvenuta in una trincea a poca distanza della tomba, collocata tra pietre, piena di terra	?	M.A.R. 1912-3, p. 8 ("caccabium")
12	olla tipo A1 (?)	Rabat, Kola Xara Street	forse associata al corredo; la tomba è sconvolta	?	M.A.R. 1929-30, p. VI ("caccabium")
13	olla tipo A1 (?)	Rabat (scavo del 7 aprile 1911)	usata come cinerario, con ossa di bambino all'interno	?	Notebook Zammit n° 3, pp. 99-100 ("caccabium")
14	olla tipo A1	Tac-Cghaqi	rinvenuta in un taglio superficiale della roccia, con ossa animali all'interno, collocata tra pietre disposte intorno al fondo quasi cementato con la terra	età ellenistica ?	Notebook Zammit n° 1, p. 37, schizzo a pag. 27 ("caccabium")
15	olla tipo A10	Tarxien-Luqa Road	associata al corredo	età ellenistico-romana	M.A.R. 1952-3, p. III ("a cylindrical vessel")
16	pentola ?	Zejtun	associata al corredo	dal III sec. a.C. al 400 d.C.	M.A.R. 1963, p. 6, tav. 2 ("a large squat jar")
17	<i>foculum</i>	Tac-Cghaqi, tomba 13	rinvenuto frammentario nel riempimento della tomba	I a.C.-I d.C.	Zammit 1931, p. 117, fig. 12 ("fire-holder")
18	<i>foculum</i>	Tac-Cghaqi, tomba 18	associato al corredo	I a.C.-I d.C.	Zammit 1931, p. 122-125, fig. 19 ("fire-holder")

3) L'olla tipo **A10** è documentata in un solo contesto (n° **15**).

4) Sembrano scarsamente documentate anche le pentole ampiamente diffuse a Tas-Silġ²; l'esemplare da Zejtun ("a large squat jar"; n° **16**) è piuttosto dubbio, dato che sembra caratterizzato da un piede anomalo per una ceramica da fuoco. Inoltre la cronologia del contesto è molto ampia, a causa del suo continuo riuso dal III sec. a.C. al 400. d.C.

A questa documentazione vanno aggiunti alcuni esemplari appartenenti a due tipi non attestati nella tabella e rinvenuti durante un primo veloce *survey* nei magazzini del *National Museum* a La Valletta:

* due pentole rinvenute in un probabile contesto funerario a Ta Qali, (indicazione del cartellino: "Ta Qali, near industrial estate, July 1975"), caratterizzate da ampio orlo a tesa, pareti verticali e netta carena del fondo; si tratta di *caccabi* romane molto diffuse nel Mediterraneo a partire dal II sec. a.C. fino al I d.C. (Olcese 1993, pp. 123-124, pp. 218-219); gli esemplari da Ta Qali sono associati a materiali principalmente di I sec. d.C.. L'impasto, ricco di mica, ci suggerisce una provenienza non locale dei due recipienti. Il tipo è attestato a Tas-Silġ finora da un unico esemplare, rinvenuto nei depositi del vano 4 (n. inv. Tas 297), la cui frequentazione sembra attestata tra il I sec. a.C. e il I sec. d.C. (fig. 5)

* Da un probabile contesto funerario presso Ta Busbisia, (indicazione sul cartellino all'interno dei recipienti; "Ta Busbisia, May 1929"), provengono due olle del tipo A1 e un'altra identica a queste ma dotata di anse (fig. 6). Molti sono i dubbi sulla cronologia; a fianco dell'olla ansata vi è una cassetta con la stessa indicazione che contiene un'altra olla ansata (ma di tipo diverso) e un'anfora Mid Roman. Il tipo non sembra attestato a Tas-Silġ (fig. 6)

Sull'aspetto funzionale dei recipienti da fuoco nelle tombe ci concederemo solo una breve riflessione. In un'ottica generale la presenza di ceramica usata per cuocere i cibi suggerirebbe l'esistenza di una pratica alimentare nell'atto della deposizione del cadavere. González (1996, p. 73-74), riprendendo spunti dalla letteratura archeologica precedente, propone due interpretazioni; 1) il recipiente conteneva cibo ad "uso" del defunto 2) il recipiente viene utilizzato per un banchetto funerario in onore del defunto e poi posto insieme al corredo nella tomba. Io credo che sia necessario innanzitutto capire se i recipienti da fuoco siano realmente utilizzati per la cottura o l'offerta del cibo o siano da interpretare semplicemente come parte del corredo e quindi oggetto di appartenenza al defunto; quindi occorre verificare se vi siano tracce d'uso sulla superficie del vaso o se vi siano, dentro lo stesso o nella tomba, resti di pasto o di alimenti. In questa prospettiva infatti solo in un minimo

numero delle tombe presentate nella tabella ci sono testimonianze positive a proposito. In due casi (nn. **11** e **14**) infatti è documentata, sempre fuori dalla tomba, l'esistenza di olle su pietre disposte intenzionalmente intorno al fondo (un focolare?), in un caso con all'interno resti di ossa di piccolo mammifero od uccello; negli altri 13 casi il recipiente sembra semplicemente associato al corredo, senza particolari usi, mentre in un altro ancora (n° **13**) è usato come cinerario per un bambino. Nel caso, poi, del materiale analizzato personalmente, il *caccabus* di tradizione romana presenta tracce d'uso, l'olla ansata ne è priva. Vi possono essere comunque anche altri indizi della presenza di pasti rituali, oltre ai recipienti; in tale direzione vanno i due "fire-holders", di forma non specificata, rinvenuti nelle tombe di Tac-Caghqi (nn. **17-18**), e i resti organici, come la vertebra di pesce in una tomba di Tac-Caghqi (M.A.R. 1950-1, p. V) o le ossa di un gallo nella tomba 13 sempre di Tac-Caghqi (n° **13**).

In conclusione, da questi dati preliminari emerge come la pratica alimentare nell'ambito funerario si manifesti sotto modalità differenti rispetto al santuario di Tas-Silġ, percepibili anche attraverso la lettura del vasellame d'uso. Ritengo che uno dei dati più significativi sia la presenza preponderante a Tas-Silġ, anche se non esclusiva, delle pentole di tradizione greca (o meglio magnogreca), introdotte più o meno contemporaneamente forse in seguito a trasformazioni nelle pratiche culturali del santuario. Si tratta, comunque, di una considerazione che deve fare i conti con la scarsa conoscenza della ceramica comune in altri contesti, soprattutto domestici, della Malta punico-ellenistica.

Ringraziamenti

Mi è gradito ringraziare, dalla parte italiana, i prof. A. Ciasca e F. D'Andria, che mi hanno affidato lo studio della ceramica da fuoco di Tas-Silġ e la prof. M.P. Rossignani, coordinatrice del Dottorato dell'Università di Milano, presso cui sto continuando (in altri ambiti) la mia ricerca a Malta; dalla parte maltese tutti gli amici del *Museum of Archaeology*, principalmente il direttore A. Pace, che mi ha suggerito di scrivere l'articolo su questa rivista, N. Cutajar che mi ha stimolato nella ricerca dell'argomento e mi ha messo a disposizione con grande liberalità la documentazione d'archivio e i magazzini del museo, e C. M. Buhagiar, R. Grima, M.A. Mifsud, per la completa disponibilità e per il loro appoggio durante il lavoro (...e anche fuori da esso).

1 L'intera classe ceramica è stata analizzata da chi scrive; i reperti provenienti dall'area Sud sono stati oggetto della tesi *La ceramica da fuoco del santuario di Tas-Silġ (Malta)*, discussa presso la Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia dell'Università di Lecce nel 1998. È in corso di stampa una sintesi, mentre la tesi verrà pubblicata integralmente in tempi rapidi.

- 2 L'analisi quantitativa e funzionale dei materiali complessivi rinvenuti in queste e in altre strutture particolarmente significative del santuario è argomento del dottorato di ricerca presso l'Università Cattolica di Milano, XIV ciclo.
- 3 Per questi argomenti si rimanda alla sintesi precedentemente citata (vedi nota 1)
- 4 La n. 21 pubblicata da Caruana ha un'impressionante analogia con un esemplare conservato al Magazzino Verdala, di provenienza sconosciuta, al punto da suggerirne l'identificazione con quest'ultimo.
- 5 Ne sono state individuate due in un primo rapido survey dei magazzini a Palazzo Villiena a Rabat, con molta probabilità relative a contesti funerari

Abbreviazioni bibliografiche

- Amadasi Guzzo 1988 M.G. Amadasi Guzzo, *Sacrifici e banchetti. Bibbia ebraica e iscrizioni puniche*, in C. Grottanelli - N.F. Parise (a cura di), *Sacrificio e società nel mondo antico*, Bari 1988, pp. 97-122.
- Amadasi Guzzo 1993 M.G. Amadasi Guzzo, *Divinità fenicie a Tas-Silġ, Malta - I dati epigrafici*, in *JMS* 3, 1993, pp. 205-214.
- Amadasi Guzzo - Karageorghis 1977 M.G. Amadasi Guzzo - V. Karageorghis, *Fouilles de Kition III. Inscriptions phéniciennes*, Nicosia 1977.
- Baldacchino - Dunbabin 1953 J.G. Baldacchino - T.J. Dunbabin, *Rock Tomb at Ghajn Qajjet, near Rabat, Malta*, in *BSR* 21, 1953, pp. 32-41.
- Bats 1988 M. Bats, *Vaisselle et alimentation à Olbia de Provence (v. 350-v. 50 av. J.-C). Modèles culturels et catégories céramiques*, Paris 1988.
- Blagg - Bonanno - Luttrell 1988 T.F.C. Blagg - A. Bonanno - A.T. Luttrell, *Excavations at Hal Millieri, Malta, La Valletta* 1988.
- Bookidis 1993 N. Bookidis, *Ritual Dining at Corinth*, in N.

- Marinatos - R. Hägg (ed.), *Greek Sanctuaries. New Approaches*, London-New York 1993, pp. 45-61.
- Cagiano De Azevedo 1964-1973 M. Cagiano de Azevedo *et alii*, *Missione archeologica italiana a Malta. Rapporto preliminare delle campagne 1963-1970*, Roma 1964-1973.
- Caruana 1899 A.A. Caruana, *Ancient Pottery from the Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries in the Island of Malta*, s.l., 1899
- Ciasca 1993 A. Ciasca, *Some Considerations Regarding the Sacrificial Precincts*, in *JMS* 1993, 3, pp. 225-244.
- Culican 1970 W. Culican, *Phoenicia oil bottles and tripod bowls* in *Berytus* XIX, 1970, pp. 5-18
- Culican 1982 W. Culican, *The Repertoire of Phoenician Pottery*, in H.G. Niemeyer (ed.), *Phönizier im Westen (=MB, 8)*, Mainz a.R. 1982, pp. 45-78.
- Detienne - Vernant 1982 M. Detienne - J.P. Vernant (a cura di), *La cucina del sacrificio in terra greca*, Torino 1982.
- Olcese 1993 G. Olcese, *Le ceramiche comuni di Albintimilium. Indagine archeologica e archeometrica sui materiali dell'area del Cardine*, Firenze 1993.
- Rathje 1991 A. Rathje, *Il banchetto presso i Fenici*, in *Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punic, III*, Roma 1991, pp. 1165-1168.
- Sparkes-Talcott 1970 B.A. Sparkes - L. Talcott, *The Athenian Agora XIII. Black and Plain Pottery of the 6th-5th-4th centuries B.C.*, Princeton-New York 1970.
- Tamburello 1969 I. Tamburello, *Una classe di vasi arcaici da Palermo*, in *ArchClass* XXI, 1969, pp. 270-277.
- Vidal Gonzáles 1996 P. Vidal Gonzáles, *La isla de Malta en Época Fenicia y Púnica*, (BAR S653), Oxford 1996
- Zammit 1931 T. Zammit, *The Maltese rock-cut tombs of a Late pre-Christian type*, in *Bulletin of the Museum*, III, 1931, pp. 101-131.

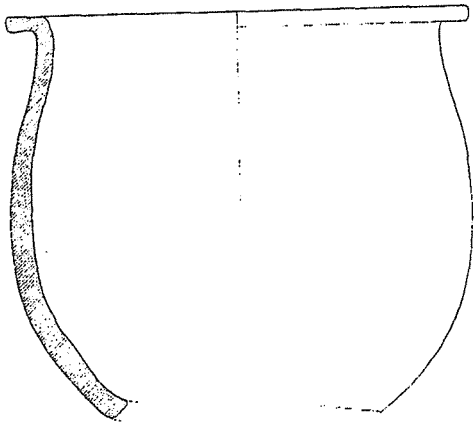


Fig.1

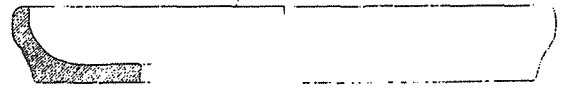


Fig.4

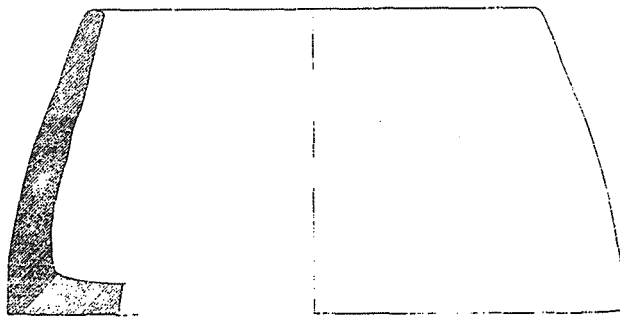


Fig.2

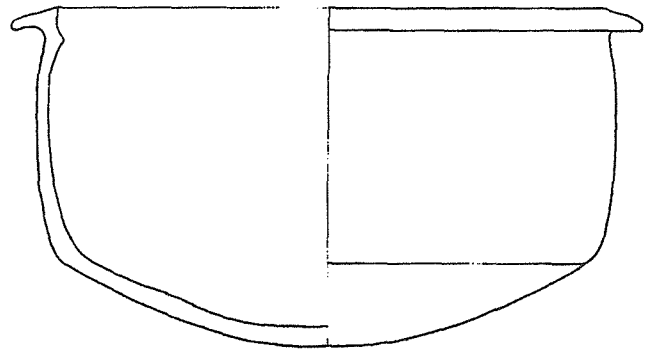


Fig.5

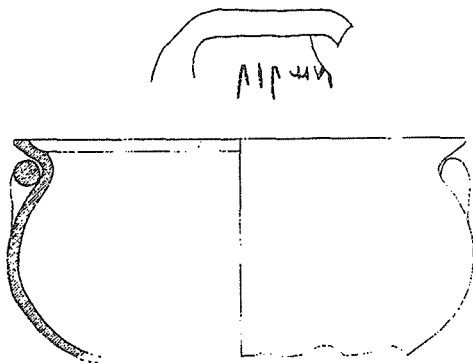


Fig.3

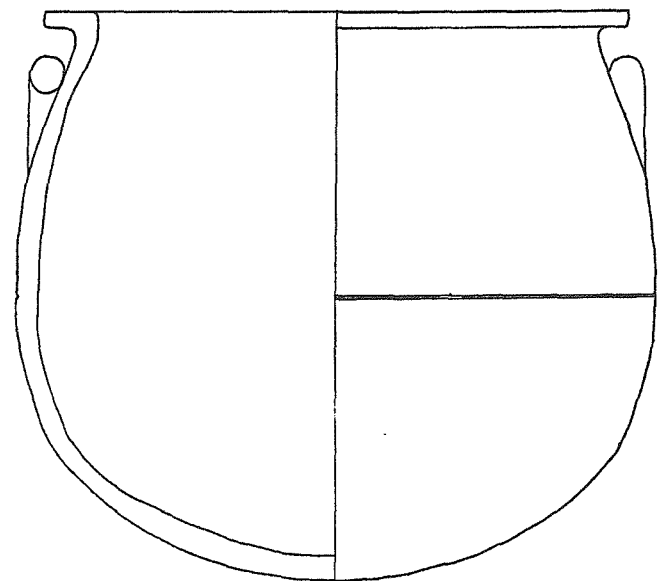


Fig.6

Carapecchia's intervention at the Inquisitor's Palace - 1733-34

Kenneth Gambin

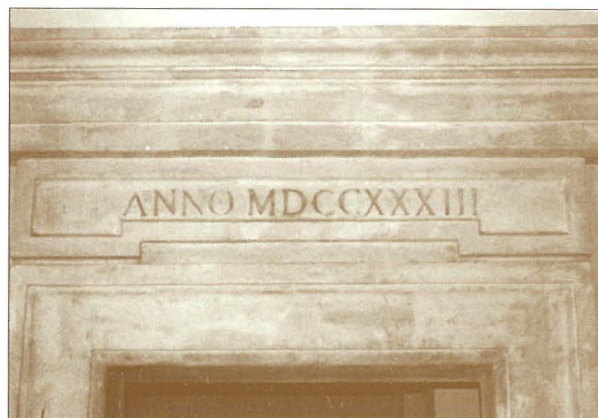
The Inquisitor's Palace, sited in the heart of the historical city of Vittoriosa, is one of the very few surviving palaces of its kind which in the early modern period could be found all over Europe and South America. Many simply succumbed to the ravages of time or else were victims of the reactionary power unleashed by the French Revolution. Fortunately, the Maltese Inquisitor's Palace, throughout its five centuries of history, always hosted high-ranking officials representing the main powers on the island, who ensured its survival. The Palace also managed to survive through the ordeal of the Second World War and the threat of modern development, and although much has been changed in its structure by its successive occupants, it is today an architectural gem, representative of the chequered history of the Maltese islands.

Yet, until now, our knowledge of the Palace and its history remained very incomplete, and all one can find is small pieces of information scattered here and there in various sources. The history of the Palace received a boost last year with the publication of three previously unknown plans of the building discovered in Rome.¹ Yet much still remains to be done in foreign as well as (as in this case) in local archives, in order to fully appreciate the history and vicissitudes of the Inquisitor's Palace, especially when placed in a wider Maltese and European context.

The background

The *Palazzo del Sant'Officio* was not built purposely as a residence for the inquisitors of Malta. The Palace was built in the 1530s by the Order of St John as their civil courts and it served that purpose until 1571, when the Order transferred its headquarters to Valletta. It remained vacant for three years, until 1574, when it was given to Mgr Pietro Dusina, the first General Inquisitor and Apostolic Delegate of Malta, to be used as his residence. In the first decades of the Holy Office in Malta the Palace was considered unsuitable and inhospitable by the high ranking dignitaries who had to reside in it, and they tried to transform it into a more suitable place. Letters by local inquisitors to the Holy Congregation in Rome are, in fact, replete with references to the need for repairs and embellishments in various parts of the Palace. Major restructuring works were carried out by Inquisitor Fabio Chigi in the 1630s, Inquisitor Gerolamo Casanate in the 1660s, and Tommaso Ruffo in the 1690s. The next major development took place in the 1730s.

Inquisitor Giovanni Francesco Stoppani arrived in Malta in March 1731. Apparently he had been briefed by his predecessor, Fabrizio Serbelloni, about the works which were planned for the Inquisitor's Palace. Serbelloni, in fact, had already planned - and obtained permission from his superiors of the Holy Congregation in Rome - to carry out restructuring works at the Inquisitor's Palace: the replacement of the beamed ceilings of the three halls of the *Piano Nobile*.² The commencement of works, however, had to be postponed, since the wood which had been ordered directly from Venice for the beams (it was cheaper than if it had been ordered locally) had not yet arrived. Stoppani, on his part, did not simply wait. Barely a month after his arrival, he had reconfirmed the need for the structural repairs by commissioning two carpenters, Antonio Fiteni and Giuseppe Azzopardo, to give him a condition report of the state of conservation of the said ceilings. They asserted that the *travi non sono più in stato da poter soffrir il peso cha hanno anzi chiaramente si vede che minacciano rovina*. According to their estimate, the cost of their replacement would have amounted to 1,250 *scudi Maltesi*.³



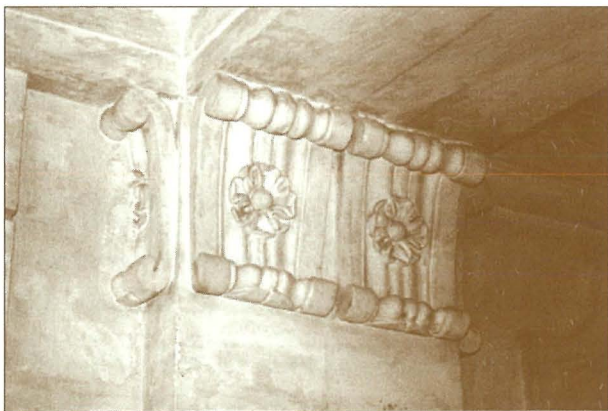
MCCCXXXIII: 1733 - the year in which the entire project was planned and executed was recorded on the lintel of the door facing the Bibliotheca

This report was sent to Rome for approval by the Holy Congregation,⁴ which on its part instructed Stoppani to proceed *secondo il suo arbitrio e prudenza*.⁵ Basing himself on this report, therefore, Stoppani's initial plans were to refurbish the halls of the *Piano Nobile*. The wood which had been ordered from Venice arrived in Malta only in 1733. Work on the ceilings commenced immediately. However, while the works were in progress, unexpected abundant rains caused one of the walls of the main hall to absorb much more water than usual. As a result it collapsed onto the main staircase.



The coat of arms of the Roman Inquisition designed by Carapeccchia for the ceiling of the main staircase. The 37 (?canne) of tela used for the coat of arms were sewn by Maestro Lorenzo Borg. It was fixed to the ceiling with 10 migliari di chiodetti, and pittore Gio. Antonio [] took care of the stucco and the painting (fols 368-72)

Even the prison cells were at risk of not being utilised. According to Stoppani, the principal cause of such a collapse was the soil which the Maltese used to build with instead of lime. The damage was so extensive that Stoppani had to seek temporary alternative accommodation for himself and his staff for up to six months in a nearby residence, for which he had to pay rent. This was an added burden for the Inquisition Tribunal, since, the financial situation of the Holy Office was far from being a happy one.⁶



A detail of Carapeccchia's architectural design

This dramatic situation needed some quick thinking and decision taking. Stoppani was quick to react. His first decision was to reconstruct the staircase as it was before, making use of the arch which used to support it. But

after having certified that this was in an imminent state of collapse, he thereupon immediately decided to embark on a more extensive and ambitious project for the Inquisitor's Palace as a whole. Instead of simply refurbishing the halls of the *Piano Nobile*, he resolved to reconstruct a new majestic entrance to the Palace together with the main staircase *con simetria e decoro corrispondente al corpo dell'edifizio*, ensuring that it became the centre-piece of the whole Palace, *ritoccando le adiacenti stanze ed officine che la cingono come nel centro del Palazzo*. Once he was at it, Stoppani also built the *Bibliotheca*, the secondary flight of stairs which leads to the second floor, reconstructed a section of the prison complex, enlarged the Family's quarters, gave a facelift to the garden (reference to *battumatori per il giardino*), constructed a passageway which links the Ruffo Apartments to the auditor's offices, and constructed a new drainage system for the Palace, whose foundations were accumulating unnecessary amounts of water to the detriment of the whole building. Possibly, he also reconstructed part, if not all, of the chapel, which is in the main hall of the *Piano Nobile*.



The remains of the colossal sculpture with three papal coat of arms and a replica of the original inscription put in place by Vincenzo Bonello in 1930 (see Carapeccchia's plan)

That this was a massive project is clear from the register which the meticulous *procuratore* of the Holy Office, B. Ciantar, used to list down to the slightest detail regarding all the different types of works which were being carried out, including the workers, their different tasks, their 'salary scale', the materials they used and for what, and all the various expenses.⁷ The work went on uninterruptedly for one whole year, from July 1733 to July 1734, involving in all 150 workers working 5 to 6 days a week, ranging from 17 *falegnami* (carpenters), 15 *battumatori* (earth-beaters), 2 *pittori* (painters), 5 *muratori* (stone masons), 7 *stuccatori* (plasterers), one *ferraro* (blacksmith), one *guardiano* (watchman), 4 *scultori* (sculptors), one *vitraro* (glazier), one *cugitore* (tailor), 88 *manoali/lavoratori/ragazzi* (labourers), and 6 *schiavi* (slaves), including 17 *Maestri* (skilled craftsmen). The original nucleus of workers was kept throughout, but constant recruitment and changes kept going on as the works progressed, also dictated by



Three views of the main staircase of the Inquisitor's Palace during restoration by Vincenzo Bonello in 1930

necessity, (eg. the *battumatori* were not needed from the start, but only after the new beamed roofs were put in place). By May 1734 the bulk of the project must have been over since there was a drastic decrease in the number of workers and in their load.

The large scale of the project could also be gathered from a quantitative analysis of the materials used: a total of 153 *salme* of *calce* (lime), and 6,223 *cariche* (?cart loads) of stones (excluding a considerable number of *balate*, *dadi*, *capitelli*, *mensole*, *chiavi*, *cantoni*, and *scaline* - the majority from a quarry in Santa Venera), and *turba* (earth material) and *arena* (sand) from St Julian's, and *terracotta* and *puzzolana* from Rabat. The proper understanding of the materials used, including a lot of details on Baroque interiors and artists' techniques - which still have to be studied fully - should be of great interest to present-day architects, conservators and restorers.

Fully aware of the bureaucracy of Rome, but also because the circumstances (as described above) so dictated (*non ammettea consiglio*), Stoppani took the initiative to authorise the new project himself without previously obtaining the go-ahead from Rome, as he was bound to do. Not having enough money to finance this project, he decided to make use of the accumulated funds of the local office of the *Reverenda Fabbrica di San Pietro* (which also operated from the Inquisitor's Palace) for the purpose. He informed the Holy Congregation of his financial 'policy' and of the whole project, including the plans and elevations for approval, only one week after the work was completed, taking the maximum advantage of the communication difficulties and of the particular circumstances.⁸ Stoppani's tactic seems to have been intentional, since it appears that he did not even refer once to the works in progress at the Palace in

his numerous letters to the Holy Congregation while the works were still going on. Probably, what convinced Stoppani to keep a very low profile on this project was the sum total of the entire plan, which amounted to 5,243 *scudi*.⁹

Another underlying reason why Stoppani would have embarked on such an extensive project was that of status. In a society which put a lot of emphasis on façade effect, protocol and the order of precedence, the Palace was considered to be the outward sign of the splendour of a family or institution. It was used to impress and command deference, even if it masked onerous debts.¹⁰ Conspicuous consumption was a value widely shared by eighteenth century European society as a form of communication: 'to be distinguished from others, whether equals (and therefore rivals), or inferiors'.¹¹ In other words, besides the real necessity to construct a new staircase, the project would also have been undertaken for what it symbolised, for its contribution to a particular image which the inquisitor wanted to project of himself and of the Inquisition in general.¹² As Inquisitor Giacomo Caracciolo instructed his successor Ranieri d'Elci in 1710, *conviene all'inquisitore di Malta il trattarsi splendidamente ... poiche in questa forma ... concilia gran rispetto*.¹³ In Stoppani's case the immediate intended receivers of this kind of message would have been the Bishop of Malta and the Grand Master; more the latter than the former. The reigning Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena has in fact been described as 'a great prince determined to transform Malta into a typical Baroque State' through his intense building activity.¹⁴ It was precisely during this period that the Grand Master was erecting the beautiful magisterial palace of Mdina (*Palazzo Vilhena*). Stoppani obviously did not want to be any less, and he probably grasped this opportunity to demonstrate his power.

It was precisely the staircase which acted as the definite architectural point of reference in which this social discourse took place.¹⁵ It was in itself an important vehicle of diplomacy since one's social standing was acknowledged precisely by the point in the staircase in which the Inquisitor received his guests. The paying of calls in fact was so important that it required specific instruction books setting forth its principles and details. Even the inquisitors of Malta had their own manual which they used in such occasions.¹⁶

Actually it appears that Stoppani, as a man of his times, was very keen on his social standing, and he took full advantage of this particular situation to transform the Palace to satisfy his requirements and aspirations. During his tenure of office, in fact, he also protested with his superiors in Rome that certain Maltese jurats were using four horses to pull their carriage, while he had only two. Stoppani therefore was given permission to use up to six horses to pull his carriage since he held a much more important position.¹⁷

The architect

A key entry of this document is without any doubt that of 19 April 1734 concerning the mind behind such a project: the architect

*Per 24 Zecchini Magistrali dati al Molt' Illustré Signore Fra Romano Carapecchi[a] come architetto per aver fatto il disegno della scala, ed assistito diverse volte nell'esequione del suo disegno: 102 scudi*¹⁸

Romano Carapecchia arrived at the court of the Order of St John in 1707 and he remained in Malta right up to his death in 1738. At the time of his arrival, the Baroque spirit was still lacking in Malta.¹⁹ Throughout his 31 years of residence on the island, however, Carapecchia managed to 'draw early eighteenth century architecture in Malta within the mainstream of this great European cultural movement' through his 'constant search for new solutions', 'intensive creative drive' and 'superb technical skill', especially during the magistracy of Grand Master Vilhena.²⁰

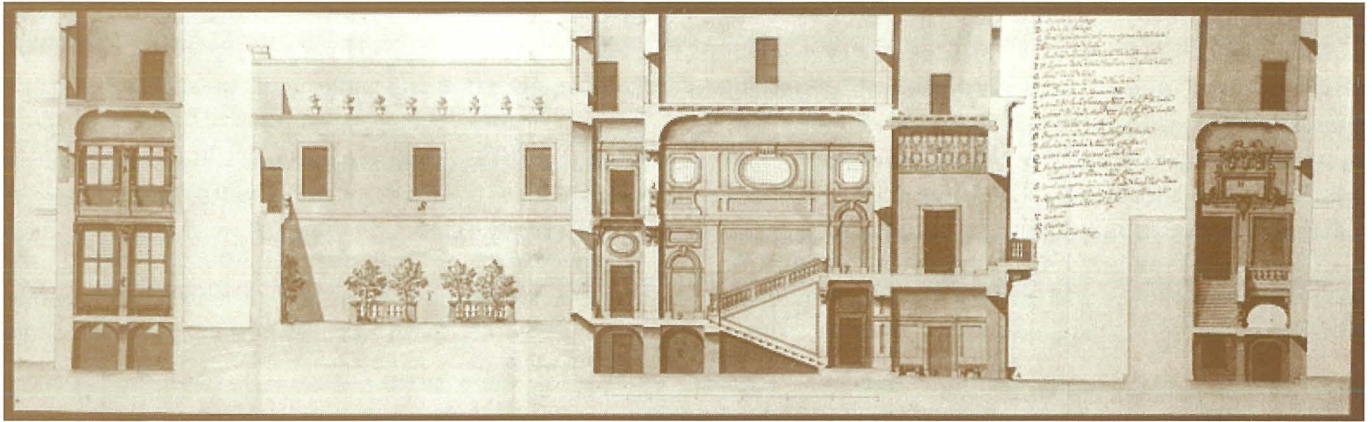
Many of the buildings which were being erected in Malta at this time have the imprint of Carapecchia on them. Some of them, such as the Manoel Theatre, the church of St Catherine of Italy in Valletta, and Palazzo Spinola in St Julian's, just to mention a few, are very well known. Others, however, are less known, while others still remain unknown. Fortunately, the existence of an album of architectural drawings authored by Carapecchia himself at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London has enabled Arch. Denis De Lucca to produce a very interesting book on this architect and thereby making known many of Carapecchia's masterpieces and his overall contribution to Malta's architectural history.

Carapecchia was a very busy professional in 1733. He had just been approached by the Bailiff Fra Gio. Battista Spinola to enlarge and enhance his palace in St Julian's bay.²¹ Besides, Carapecchia was also engrossed in designing a new monastery for the Franciscan Minor Conventuals of Valletta, and a new parish church of St Publius in Floriana.²² In addition, it is now clear that Carapecchia was also commissioned by Inquisitor Stoppani to design a new majestic entrance and main staircase for the Inquisitor's Palace after the accidents described above.

This staircase has been described as having 'an important niche in the history of Maltese staircases' since from it eventually evolved other important ones such as that of the Augustinian Priory at Rabat (1740), the Auberge de Castille (1741), and the National Museum of Fine Arts (1761).²³

It is also apparent that Carapecchia did not just limit himself to design the project, but he also firmly engaged himself in its execution. It is not difficult to imagine him interacting with the *maestri* and workers mentioned above, providing several 'inventive ideas' to solve any technical problems which would have inevitably arisen during the actual building process, as he himself had advised architects to do in his *Compendio Architettonico* of the 1680s.²⁴ It is also not to be excluded that Carapecchia may have designed some alterations to the chapel of the Inquisitor's Palace (whose retaining wall had collapsed as described above), as well as some of the iron brackets and doors and apertures complementary to the project, as he did for St John's Conventual Church.²⁵ The construction of a new drainage system for the entire Palace could also possibly be a result of Carapecchia's expertise in the realm of water engineering.²⁶ In any case, considering the extent of the project and the multiple problems it faced and managed to solve at one go, it appears improbable that the contribution of Carapecchia was strictly limited to the design. A master mind would have been needed to envisage these multi-faceted problems and tackle them as one whole.

The design of the Inquisitor's Palace has indeed been published on page 93 of Arch. De Lucca's book (from page 14 of the Conway Album, London). However, it has been attributed to one of Carapecchia's works in Rome: the *Isola Tiberina* project, including the *Fatebenefratelli* Hospital.²⁷ The two designs on page 13 and 14 of the said album have in fact some similarities (notably the ceiling). However the second one certainly belongs to the 1733-34 plan of the Inquisitor's Palace. Apparently this was an earlier sketch of the project, since some minor details are different from the actual state of the building. The subsequent final design, the original watercolour of which has only lately been found in the



Carapecchia's plan for the main entrance of the Inquisitor's Palace. (From: J. Azzopardi & W. Zammit, 'Inquisitor's Palace in Vittoriosa: Discovery of three original plans in Rome' in *Treasures of Malta*, Easter 1999, pp.15-20).

Vatican archives,²⁸ matches perfectly with the present day building.

This actually gives rise to two possibilities: either that it is a mistaken attribution, or that Carapecchia recycled his plan of the *Fatebenefratelli* Hospital and adapted it to the Inquisitor's Palace. The second possibility, although not to be discarded, is perhaps unlikely, considering the great ease with which Carapecchia designed (*disegnava a meraviglia*), and the exactness with which it matches that of the Inquisitor's Palace.

From this plan one can also appreciate one of the main traits of Carapecchia as an architect: that of respecting older building fabrics when having to add new sections onto them.²⁹ He managed to create a magnificent entrance and main staircase to the Palace - complete with a colossal sculpture including three papal coat of arms, an inscription, and the impressive coat of arms of the Roman Inquisition on the ceiling - only with minor interventions on the rooms close to the area intended to be reconstructed. In order to interfere less with the adjoining rooms he lighted the staircase with 'carefully positioned high level windows' as he had done in the nunnery dedicated to St Catherine in Valletta.³⁰ The façade was also left intact as it had been designed by Francesco Sammut in 1660.

The finished project of the Inquisitor's Palace, the official seat of the Pope's representative in Malta, must have certainly added to the prestige enjoyed by Carapecchia. Actually this was not the first time that Carapecchia had worked closely with the Holy Office. In the 1720s he had been asked to produce a design to replace the existing façade of the church of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa, whose patron was the inquisitor himself (then Antonio Ruffo), who intended to boost his stature as papal legate by enhancing the prestige of 'his' church.³¹ Carapecchia must also have collaborated closely with Inquisitor Ruffo when he drew the *Ristretto generale di tutte le Cisterne e Gebbie pubbliche e private...* in all the harbour area, including Vittoriosa and the Inquisitor's Palace in 1723.³²

This was not the first time that the Holy Office made use of architects of the Order of St John for structural works in the Palace. The same had happened with Giovanni Barbara and Inquisitor Caracciolo in 1707.³³

Carapecchia's plan of 1733 also allows us to make some wider observations on the Inquisitor's Palace and its history as a building. It is certain that the level above the *Piano Nobile* had been built before 1733 (though definitely not before 1696 since it is not included in the plan of that year). In 1733 the room above the Chancery was in fact used by the *Signor Segretario dell'Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Mons. Inquisitore*.³⁴ It is still not known when the upper floor of the Palace was constructed, but it is possible that it was the work of Inquisitor Giacomo Caracciolo (1706-1710) and architect Giovanni Barbara in 1707.³⁵ The fact that no official records referring to this work have been found so far could arise from the fact that Caracciolo had paid for it from his own pocket and then simply put a plaque in the main staircase as a record of his munificence. However, this does not specify what the work consisted of, and the letter which had been sent to Rome describing the works undertaken³⁶ has not been traced as yet.

In any case, it is hoped that this discovery sheds more light and engenders more appreciation for the history of the Inquisitor's Palace and its wider significance as part of our European cultural heritage.

References

- ¹ J. Azzopardi and W. Zammit, 'Inquisitor's Palace in Vittoriosa: Discovery of the three original plans in Rome' in *Treasures of Malta*, Easter 1999, pp. 15-20.
- ² AIM, Corr.94, f.236v, Serbelloni to Cardinal Ottoboni, 1 October 1729.
- ³ AIM, Mem.5, ff.165-166v, 19 April; 18 June 1731.
- ⁴ AIM, Cor.94, f.266v, Stoppani to Holy Congregation, 16 July 1731.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, Corr.25, f.26, Cardinal Ottoboni to Stoppani, 11 August 1731.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, Corr.94, ff.286-287v, Stoppani to Holy Congregation, 16 February 1732.

- ⁷ AIM, Mem.5, ff.352-382v, *Libro delli pagamenti fatti dal procuratore del Sant Officio alli lavoratori cha hanno lavorato nel Palazzo Apostolico del Sant Officio di Malta per il risarcimento dei soffitti fatti nuovi nella Cancellaria, Sala dei Staffieri, ed Anticamera, nuova loggia, nuova fabrica, ed altro bisognevole dal dì 24 Luglio 1733, sin' oggi dì 16 Luglio 1734.*
- ⁸ AIM, Corr.95, ff.25v-26v, Stoppani to Holy Congregation, 24 July 1734.
- ⁹ However, in his letter to Rome Stoppani affirmed that the total cost had amounted only to 1903.34 *scudi*. Was this a result of the difference in the rate of exchange between *scudi Romani* and *scudi Maltesi*?
- ¹⁰ R. Cleary, *The Palace Royale and urban design in the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1999), p.12.
- ¹¹ P. Burke, *The historical anthropology of early modern Italy* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.132-6.
- ¹² P. Burke, 'Res et verba. Conspicuous consumption in the early modern world' in J. Brewer and R. Porter (eds), *Consumption and the world of goods* (London-New York, 1994), p.149.
- ¹³ AIM, *Memorie*, Vol.1 (Caracciolo), f.18v.
- ¹⁴ D. De Lucca, *Carapēcchia. Master of baroque architecture in early eighteenth century Malta* (Malta, 1999), p.182.
- ¹⁵ P. Waddy, *Seventeenth century Roman palaces. Use and the art of the plan* (New York, 1990), pp.3-8.
- ¹⁶ NLM, Lib. Vol.23, f.4, *Trattamenti dell'Inquisitore nel ricevere e rendere le visite.*
- ¹⁷ A. Bonnici, *Storja ta' l-Inkizizzjoni ta' Malta*, III (Malta, 1994), p.85.
- ¹⁸ AIM, Mem.5, f.370v.
- ¹⁹ De Lucca, p.9.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.viii.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p.188.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p.195.
- ²³ L. Mahoney, 'Secular architecture', in *Birgu. A Maltese maritime city*, Vol.II (Malta, 1993), p.446.
- ²⁴ De Lucca, p.47.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.212.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.263.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.90-6.
- ²⁸ Azzopardi and Zammit, 19.
- ²⁹ De Lucca, p.211.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.133.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, p.167.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p.263-80.
- ³³ AIM, Corr. 94, f.134v, Caracciolo to Holy Congregation, 19 October 1707.
- ³⁴ AIM, Mem.5, f.165.
- ³⁵ AIM, Corr.94, ff.134-135, Caracciolo to Holy Congregation, 19 October 1707.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, Corr.19, f.80, Cardinal Marescotti to Gio. Battista Napulone, 22 November 1710.

Dedicated to Vincenzo Bonello, who in 1939 'literally resurrected Carapēcchia from total oblivion' (De Lucca, p.vii), and who during the 1920s and 1930s resurrected the Inquisitor's Palace from 'the abundant traces of the awkward and mischievous meddling of man' (MAR, 1925-26, p.xi).

A Historical complex at St. Agatha - Rabat

Fr. Victor J. Camilleri MSSP

The cult and catacombs of St. Agatha

The old City of Malta, called Melita by our forefathers, was built on high ground. It was the seat of those governing the Island, where the Praetor, the Senate and the citizens took refuge. For long centuries Melita was like a strong castle to protect her inhabitants.

At the time of the Romans, it seems that the city became more important. Roman houses and other places for public meetings were found near the Villa Romana. Other known archaeological sites have shown the importance of the City. Beautiful sculptures in marble and stone, pavements of mosaic, together with pottery and glass found at these sites made Melita an important Capital city of the island.

Although people of high rank lived in this city, nobody was allowed to be cremated or buried within its walls. As far as we know, no graves of Pre-Roman or Roman times were ever discovered within the City. It was only later, at the time of the Arab era, that tombs were discovered near the Villa Romana.

For long years, these people who died within the Old City of Malta had to be taken out to be buried outside its walls. So the suburb was used and served as necropolis. All over Rabat one can see and explore graves dating back centuries before Christ right up to the Christian and Byzantine times.

Within St. Agatha's Historical Complex, one can discover various important sites: the catacombs containing different types of tombs, agape tables and frescoes; the crypt with its important medieval frescoes; the alabaster statue depicting the martyrdom of the saint; crosses of Dedication; the historical Church of 1504 and enlarged in 1670 and wherein is kept the historical marble statue which was placed on the walls of the city of Mdina on July 20th 1551, during one of frequent attacks by the Arab corsairs on the island. Nearby stands a small Museum with various collections of fossils, prehistoric remains, minerals, pottery and many other things of interest and beauty.

The Crypt of St. Agatha and adjoining Catacombs are the most renowned sectors in this complex. These places together with the Church and all the area nearby are dedicated to St. Agatha. According to an old, strong local tradition, the young Agatha is said to have sought refuge on the Island, although no documents whatsoever are to be found to support this thesis. However, tradition and

early frescoes which are found in the Crypt could indicate that her stay on the island may have been real.

Agatha was born in Catania, Sicily about 234 AD. Her parents were of high rank but said to be pagans. Agatha, from her early years, was accepted in the church and became Christian. It was the time when fierce persecution by Emperor Decius 249-251 AD was being waged against Christians. At that same time the Praetor of Catania, Quintianus, fell in love with this young Christian Virgin, and wanted her at all cost to be one of his wives. She refused his hand because of her vow to belong only to Jesus. For this reason, it is said that she came to take refuge in Malta, as this Island was under Roman rule but where Religion was tolerated.

This tradition states that while living in the Roman City – Melita - she used to come to pray on the site where Christians were buried. After her departure and martyrdom in her native city, these places at Rabat were named after her.



St. Agatha Crypt showing frescoes of 1480 and alabaster statue of 1666

Visitors to the Christian catacombs of Saint Agatha first have to pass through the Crypt. Originally this seems to have been a small cave, either natural or hewn out at the entrance of a small family catacomb. Studying the present dimensions and layout of this Crypt one can see where various graves were dug. Some of these graves are still visible on both sides of the chamber and in the ceiling over the main altar; the top of another grave lies near the side altar, and small loculi for babies are also visible. In other places can be seen sections of the original floor as normally the catacombs have very low ceilings. Although there are frescoes of the 13th and 15th century, one can notice traces of earlier frescoes of the 4th and 5th century AD. Some of them can be seen under

the present medieval frescoes, partly broken while others have been plastered over, probably in the middle ages. It is ascertained that around a thousand years ago the Crypt came to form part of this present area. It is kept in great devotion by Maltese and foreigners who visit this underground church.



12th cent. frescoes
St. Agatha and St. Paul (?)

The frescoes look like tapestries painted on the walls. Three of these, of Byzantine style, are of the 12th century, portraying characters with grave-looking faces and dressed in straight stylised attire. One of these frescoes is composed of two saints, a male saint and a female one. The first one is either one of the Fathers of the church or may be St. Paul, as the Saint is holding a book in his hand and what seems to be a sword - a straight yellow line, wide at the top and tapering towards the lower part. The saint is represented with a very long beard, and having a green/blue veil. Very probably this fresco represents St. Paul. Within the same panel of this fresco, beside the head of the female saint, there is what appears to be the letter 'A'; and still clearly visible on the other side of the head: 'TH'. So, probably, these letters form part of the name: 'Agatha'. The head of the saint is decorated with a gemmed halo, and she is holding a cross in her right hand. This cross has three horizontal lines - the symbol of a martyr. A little child is visible, kneeling at the feet of the Saint imploring grace. Can we conclude from this iconography that we are presented with a petition to St Agatha, who is also one of the three saint protectors of Malta, together with St Paul and St Publius?

The next 12th century painting is the Madonna holding Baby Jesus. It is a pity that the head of the Madonna was destroyed many years ago. At the back of these three pictures was a cistern full of water, which was damaging the frescoes. Later on, the water was removed and a door was opened from near the side altar, while a window was broken through for ventilation. This cut right into



Damaged fresco of the
Madonna

the picture and it damaged one of our earliest paintings of the Madonna on our island.

The whole Crypt is decorated with twenty-nine other frescoes, painted in 1480 AD, and are attributed to Salvatore d'Antonio. Many of the pictures show St. Agatha as seen in her iconography: a young lady wearing a dark green dress and a red veil on her shoulders; she is holding a book in her hand and a plate with a severed breast on it. At times she is also represented holding a shears with a cut breast. This is the martyrdom symbol of St. Agatha, for when she was tortured during the persecution of Emperor Decius, she is said to have had her breasts cut off. Other frescoes represent St. Lucy, St. Venera, St. Margaret of Antioch, St. Blaise, St. Leonard, Bishop St. Publius, and the Madonna. All these frescoes show that this place is to be considered as archaeologically important, and at the same time an ancient holy place.

The present main altar was built in 1666 AD to accommodate the alabaster statue of St. Agatha, and to cover the original rock altar, as is mentioned and documented by Commendator Abela in 1647. Above the altar still exists a niche, where the alabaster statue of St. Agatha, donated by Bishop Lucas Buenos in 1666 AD, who was the bishop of Malta at that time, was kept. This statue is kept at the nearby museum for better viewing and preservation. In the niche, at present, stands another statue donated by Prof. Anton Agius.

Of great importance to Christian Archaeological art are the catacombs, also dedicated to St. Agatha. These constitute a whole complex of graves and agape tables which spread underground - below the church, the Motherhouse of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, and

under the gardens of the same buildings. As a complex they extend to 4100 square metres. Beside the catacombs, attached to the same Crypt, are other smaller ones within the area of the same complex.

These catacombs and others very close by extend to the whole area of Rabat, as this served as the necropolis of the Old City for hundreds of years. Although in the early centuries Christians used catacombs for cemeteries, the idea of burying underground goes back to the Phoenician and Roman - Punic times. So it dates back to many years before Christianity was ever introduced into Malta.



Section of catacomb showing canopy (baldacchino) tomb and agape table

Much has been written on catacombs, both those found in our Island and abroad, especially in Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Palestine and other countries. A short study is being presented here in the hope of inducing those interested in local history to pay a visit to this Historical Complex.

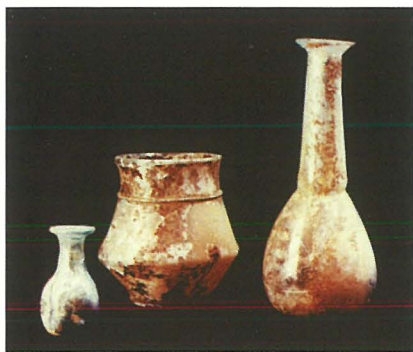
The stairs down into the Catacombs lead directly into the crypt. There, to the left hand side of the altar, just between the main altar of St. Agatha and the side altar dedicated to our Lady of Graces, a narrow entrance leads to one of the major sections. This was cleared of stones and rubble in 1890. We know that most of the ancient monuments, all over the world, including Malta, were ravaged by grave robbers in search of precious things and pottery. They broke through, and besides removing what was of interest, damaged the graves, agape tables and decorations. Later, the farmers who owned the fields above, threw in the stones and rubbish which accumulated in their fields. So most the entrances and corridors and shafts for ventilation were filled with rubble right up to the ceiling. Another section to the right, almost near the entrance, was cleaned between 1953 and 1960, and is now open to visitors.

Ad Catacumbas: "Leading to the Graves". This inscription is to be seen over these places which from the beginning were used for burial. It used to be thought that some of the catacombs were used for hiding places in times of persecution, or as living quarters. These theories are difficult to sustain, as history and research studies show no signs of persecution on our island. The absence of inscriptions or symbols of any martyrs in the Maltese Christian catacombs confirm that the Christians encountered no trouble from the Romans. The second idea of people living in the catacombs seems very absurd, as these underground cemeteries are very humid, and are just low narrow passages with many graves on either side. Although there are so many round tables - Agape tables - these were only used for the "Coena funebris" or funeral meal which was given as a sort of *Refrigeria* in honour of the dead. As these are only found in Christian cemeteries, we can say that they served as a table where the replica of Eucharist was held. Few frescoes have been found in the vast catacombs of Rome, in which people are depicted as reclining round the agape table partaking of a farewell repast. But in one of the frescoes, a man dressed in white tunic and reclining like all others, is stretching his hand on a dish in which is a fish - the symbol of Christ. *ICHTUS*, the Greek for fish, is an acrostic which stands for: Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, Saviour. This fresco, then, probably portrays a priest who is offering the Eucharist. Hence, the agape table served both as an altar for the divine service and as a table to eat on.

Agape Tables are of importance in our catacombs as they distinguish them from Pagan and Jewish catacombs. The agape tables are cut from solid rock, but are not all of the same height, and slope on the sides so that those attending have to recline round the table according to the Roman style in the *trichlinium*. The top of the table is flat, having a rim round the edge, perhaps to prevent the dishes and utensils from falling off the table. At the front, one can find a breach in one part of the rim to allow cleaning the table after the meal was over. At times one can find a seat on each side, maybe for elderly people who could not recline so low round the table. At St. Agatha's catacombs one can see round, square and oblong seats at the front of the table. It is to be said that the Church came to prohibit these funeral feasts on the agape table. So in the 5th century many of these tables were destroyed or not hewn out any longer after the era. Through the years some abuses developed, especially of overeating and drinking during these fares, so the church abolished such celebrations during the sharing of the Eucharist.

The reason that truly explains these underground catacombs is the burying of early Christians. There was no persecution of Christians, but we can state that the custom of burying Christians in this fashion was derived

from earlier non-Christian generations. Various other religions had their own private cemeteries; and moreover, the fact that so many graves differ in size, shape and style lie one next to each other lead us to believe that everybody was buried inside the catacombs irrespective of social class. But we can read into the social status of the deceased from the type of grave one was buried in. Some of the graves are a simple shaft hewn into the walls or dug in the ground. These are called *loculis* and *forma*; others are of a higher order, like the window grave or *arcosolum*; and the canopied table grave. At times, some of the graves were decorated with frescoes and sculptures. At St. Agatha's catacombs we find also a grave which is hewn right under an agape table. A square stone table slab closes the entrance to this grave. Most of the graves were intended for a couple, a few were for single occupants, while others could contain even up to six persons in every grave. This can be seen from the rock pillow and from the headrest in each pillow. These last graves were for families, in fact very near by are many baby graves as at that time infant

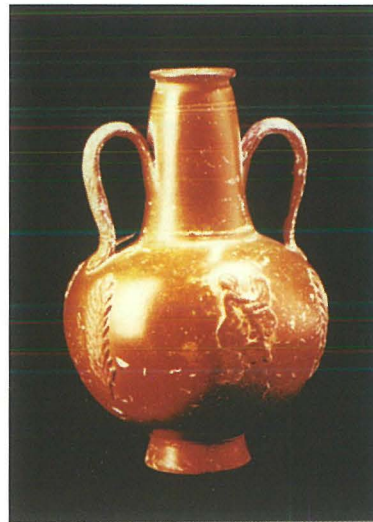


Roman glass
(Malta)

mortality was very high. In some instances, guilds had their own small cemeteries - tools of various trades are sculptured on the walls of graves or on the tomb slab which sealed the entrance of such places. At Rabat, various small catacombs of varying dimensions are scattered all over the locality. As the island is small, sometimes cemeteries of different faiths can be found almost next to each other. This can be verified both in St. Agatha's and St. Paul's Catacombs. The different denominations can be distinguished from the type of tombs, the different symbols and pottery. It is a great pity that many graves and catacombs have been robbed and devastated years ago. Collections of pottery and artefacts of the era can be seen in museums and in private collections.

Right above St. Agatha's catacombs, one can find too St. Agatha's Museum which is next to the historical Church. Most of the various collections found in the museum were the inheritance of Mons. Joseph De Piro. When he founded the Missionary Society of St. Paul, he transferred these priceless remains to the early houses of his fledgling congregation, and later to the present Motherhouse. Through the years, other collections and

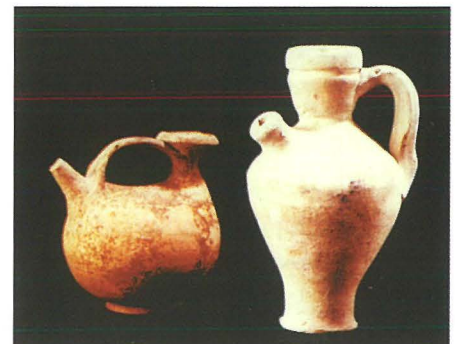
items were donated to the museum. Of particular interest is the archaeological collection consisting of amphorae, stomas, many type of dishes, bottles, cups, oil lamps



Samian ware
(2nd cent. bc)
(Malta)

and many other different artefacts. One showcase contains Etruscan pottery, and a beautiful marble statuette of Aphrodite. Roman glass cups and perfume bottles together with a collection of Roman clay statuettes display the art of antiquity.

Feeding bottles,
Roman



In a different hall is seen the interesting statue of St. Agatha in white alabaster, which is a masterpiece of intricate workmanship in prestigious marble; unique stone votive slabs of 1500 AD; a small collection of paintings; and a numismatic section. Another small hall contains Church vestments, old candlesticks, statues and the relic of St. Agatha, all gilded in gold.

Because of lack of space, many other items are found in this same hall. Old glass cruets, finger bowls used in the church, various chalices, and work in ganutell; manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Latin, and Italian Languages further enhance the collections found in the museum. Although this is a Private Church Museum, it is open daily for all those who have at heart Maltese History and Culture.

National Museum of Archaeology News: 1998 & 1999

C. Michelle Buhagiar

The following is an outline of the main projects undertaken by the Archaeology Section within the Museums Department during 1998 and 1999, in order to provide a more accessible report than that published in the Government Departments Annual Report.

1998 ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT UNIT

The Prehistoric Collection

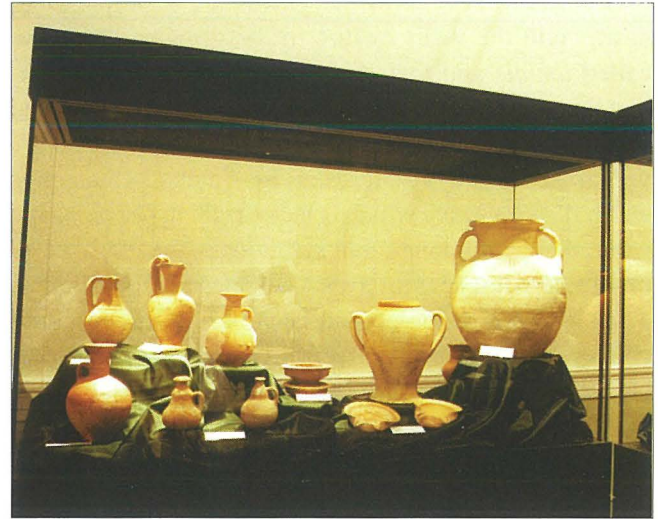
The major event at the Museum was the re-opening of its Prehistoric Collection on the 4th of April 1998. This was the result of an extensive project for a complete renovation of the display. For this reason, hundreds of prehistoric artifacts were reviewed and conserved. The project also involved the setting up of a new system of showcases, the production of graphics and models, and the preparation of extensive bi-lingual explanatory and educational texts. The interpretative display was financed by the J. P. Getty Foundation. The Museum's innovative display design has proved to be very successful with both Maltese and foreign visitors.

Structural works at the Auberge de Provence

Further structural works at the Auberge de Provence were carried out as part of the Permanent Exhibition Project. These works included the replacing of electrical and plumbing systems, the opening of blocked-up doorways, and the insertion of modern joinery works.



The re-opening of the Prehistoric Collection at the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta



*Sulla Rotta Dei Fenici
An exhibition held at the
National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta*

Sulla Rotta Dei Fenici

The Museum hosted a temporary archaeological exhibition entitled *Sulla Rotta dei Fenici* from the 3rd of November till the 20th of December. This exhibition displayed various aspects of Phoenician culture from different parts of the Mediterranean and included artifacts discovered in Malta, Sicily, Sardegna and Ibiza. The exhibition was organised jointly with the Ministry of Education and National Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura a Malta*, the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* and *Associazione Civita*. A catalogue of the exhibition was published through the sponsorship of the Malta Experience. Being the first of its kind in Malta, the exhibition drew a lot of attention, particularly from the Maltese public. Moreover, a public seminar on Phoenician and Punic archaeology was organised at the Museum, with lectures given by Dr. T. Gouder, Prof. A. Acquaro, and Prof.ssa. A. Ciasca.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE MANAGEMENT UNIT

The Hypogeum Conservation Project

The Project was continued with the installation of walkways in the upper level of the Hypogeum. This has enabled visitors to properly experience this part of the site for the first time. The audio-visual experience was finalised and translated in five languages. The audio-visual technical equipment and other related furnishings related to the experience were also installed.

Hagar Qim

A new programme of works was launched at Hagar Qim. This was intended to improve the quality of the visitor experience by re-integrating the site within its landscape. A new fence was designed with the support of the Restoration Unit of the Works Division. This was designed to minimise its visual impact by following the contours of the landscape, adopting a light tensile structure and doubling the distance from the site to the fence, without compromising security to the site. Moreover, saplings of trees from a number of species which are believed to have been present in Malta in prehistory were also planted and the carpark was upgraded.

Tarxien Temples

New, improved sanitary facilities were installed at the site. Moreover, a number of information panels were set up within the site itself. These initiatives were partially commissioned by the Bank of Valletta International Heritage Trust.

World Monuments Watch Grant

Following a successful application submitted by the Museums Department, the World Monuments Watch awarded a \$50,000 grant for a conservation study at Mnajdra, aiming at a better understanding of deterioration processes affecting the site, and identifying safe solutions.

UNESCO World Heritage Emergency Fund

On the 28th of November 1998, a collapse occurred at Hagar Qim, in the northern side of the first apse on the right as one enters through the main entrance. This collapse was immediately brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee, which was in session when the collapse happened. A request for emergency funds was processed and approved by the Committee immediately, resulting in the grant of \$72,000.

HERITAGE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT UNIT

Tomb at Birkirkara

A double-chambered rock-cut tomb was discovered at Triq il-Kbira, Has-Sajjied, Birkirkara. The tomb had been heavily disturbed and none of its original contents were found. However, its internal rock-cut features were extremely well preserved. The tomb roughly dates to the Late Roman era. The owner of the property in which this tomb was found assisted Museum personnel in its cleaning and recording and is also preserving the tomb.

Bronze Age remains at Birzebbugia

A spectacular discovery was made during works being carried out immediately to the south of the megalithic temple of Borg in-Nadur. This consisted of a massive

masonry structure similar to the well-known Bronze Age defensive wall on the other side of the hill-top at Borg in-Nadur. The investigation of the remains established conclusively that they date to the Borg in-Nadur phase, and that they belong to an extensive system of Bronze Age fortifications that seem to encircle the entire hill-top. Furthermore, it was determined that this defensive wall had been constructed over the remains of an earlier domestic structure, probably including a small oven. Pottery analysis suggests that this structure is also datable to the Bronze Age.



Bronze Age remains discovered at Birzebbugia

Archaeological Excavations at Tas-Silġ

The Section was involved in the superintendence of two archaeological investigations at the multi-period site of Tas-Silġ, Marsaxlokk. The *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta* continued with the re-evaluation of the site's northern half, while the University of Malta carried on with its excavations in the southern half. Talks between the Museums Department and the *Missione Archeologica* were initiated with respect to the long-term conservation and public presentation of this outstanding, yet little appreciated monument.

Discovery of skeletons at Marsaxlokk

Two human skeletons were discovered in the coastal area known as Ghar l-Ahmar in Marsaxlokk. The first skeleton was found in a supine position within a shallow rectangular pit cut into the natural sub-soil. The body had been oriented on an east/west axis, the head being placed to the west. A full excavation of this burial was carried out.

Unfortunately, the second skeleton was disturbed by vandals before its location was reported to the Museum. The remains - consisting of a substantial amount of a human skeleton - were collected, and are being studied together with the skeleton found earlier in the year, and in connection with another three inhumations recorded from this area over the last 30 years.

Archaeological interventions at Mdina

Three archaeological interventions were carried out in Mdina, in relation to ongoing development works at Mesquita Square, Xara Palace and at St. Paul's Street respectively. The interventions were all emergency



Excavations at Mesquita Square, Mdina

investigations. Nevertheless they provided a wealth of entirely new archaeological data on the origins and history of Mdina.

Important Phoenician layers (datable to the 8th/6th Century BC) were encountered with at both Mesquita Square and at Palazzo Xara. These layers included the remains of various domestic floors and hearths. The Mesquita Square sondage revealed an impressive Punic ashlar construction. Given its dimensions, these remains must have belonged to either an outstanding public construction, or else to a defensive construction.

Equally impressive were the Byzantine and Islamic remains discovered at the same two sites. At Mesquita Square, a large pit was discovered, abutting the large ashlar Punic wall, containing an amazingly large amount of Islamic pottery.

Early modern remains were also investigated at Palazzo Xara and St. Paul's Street, illustrating Mdina's transformation by the Order of St John during the 16th and 17th Centuries.

Punic tomb at Ghajn Dwieli

A rock-cut tomb was discovered at Triq il-Vittmi Tax-Xoghol, Ghajn Dwieli, Paola. Most of the tomb's original contents were found to be missing. However, investigation of the few remains, together with the shape of the tomb itself, suggest that it is Punic in date. This tomb is the fourth one to be discovered in this area in recent years. Arrangements for the tomb's preservation were undertaken with Enemalta, who are the proprietors of the site.

Investigations at Xarolla

The investigation of the Xarolla catacomb cluster was

resumed, resulting in the uncovering of nine new small catacombs. These catacombs are located further to the west of the catacombs discovered in 1996. Although severely damaged, these remains provided us with more valuable information about the necropolis at Xarolla. A fence was erected around this impressive cluster of Late Roman funerary monuments, through the agency of the Works Division.

A tomb was also discovered at this site during trenching works in the Zurrieq-Hal Safi Road. This tomb was found largely devoid of its original contents. Access to the tomb was maintained through the construction of a man-hole.

Medieval Ceramics Survey

A re-assessment of the extensive collection of archaeological materials kept in the Museum archives was carried out. In view of the forthcoming opening of the historic galleries at the Auberge de Provence, priority was given to the study of the Classical and Medieval materials. In particular, during June, a thorough survey of all the Museum holdings of Medieval ceramics was carried out, with the generous assistance of Dott.ssa Alessandra Molinari of the Università di Siena. Materials from 28 different excavations were examined in detail and a remarkable amount of new information on Malta's little-understood Medieval past was compiled. This information has been presented in a Technical Report and will form the basis of the Museum's projected Medieval display.

1999

ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT UNIT

Permanent Exhibition Project

The main objective for 1999 was to continue the refurbishment project within the Auberge de Provence, in preparation for the new archaeological displays to be sited on the upper floor galleries. This saw the installation and refurbishment of all joinery works on the upper floor, which included the restoration of all wall mouldings as well as the apertures overlooking Republic Street.

Excavation works were also conducted within the acquired premises of 141 Melita Street and the adjacent museum premises in preparation for the development and installation of a substation and lift. Clearance works were also carried out in the premises at 8, 9, 10, and 11c in Cart Street, in order to assess the structural conditions in preparation for the Museum basement project.

During these works, a number of interesting discoveries were made. In a recess in one of the upper floor rooms, some objects possibly dating to the 17th century were

found. These included a letter, a hand-woven sock, part of a sleeve cuff, and the waistband of male underwear bearing the letters "REV. BU...". The excavation works in the lower floor of the Auberge yielded ceramic material dating to the period when the building housed the Union Club.

Works continued on the Prehistoric Galleries of the Museum. These works included the upgrading and improvement of the display, through the setting up of additional information and graphics. Moreover, the design and planning processes of the upper floor permanent exhibition were initiated.

Temporary Exhibitions

The Museum held three temporary exhibitions and hosted a number of lectures and events with the theme of cultural heritage:

An Island in Prehistory (Ostrov Davnych Veku) – Malta 5000-2500 BC

This exhibition, which focused on the Prehistoric Collection, was initiated by the Corinthia Group of Companies in collaboration with AirMalta, Prague Castle and the National Museum of Archaeology. This exhibition formed part of a series of events marking AirMalta's inaugural flight service to Prague, which helped forge new relations between Malta and the Czech



An Island in Prehistory – Exhibition held in Prague Castle, Czech Republic

Republic, not only on an intergovernmental level but also within a cultural heritage dimension. The exhibition was held in Prague Castle between the 11th and the 22nd of May, and included an interesting cross section of Maltese prehistoric material.

Seven Women, Seven Temples

This exhibition consisted of a collection of paintings and sculptures inspired by seven Maltese temples. The exhibition was initiated and organised by Ms Marie Mifsud in collaboration with the National Museum of Archaeology. The exhibition, which was held in the salon

of the Auberge between the 28th of October and the 18th of November, was accompanied by a catalogue showing the works of the seven artists whose works made up the exhibition. These artists were Julie Apap, Jeni Caruana, Sina Farrugia, Ebba von Fersen Balzan, Anna Grima, Caroline Hills and Olaug Vethal. On the occasion of this exhibition, the National Museum of Archaeology received a donation of temporary exhibition boards of a total value of Lm1000.

Fragments de Civilisation

This exhibition consisted of a series of photographic montages prepared by the French photographer/artist Jackie Just. All the exhibits dealt with the theme of Malta's megalithic architecture. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with the French Embassy in Malta and was opened on the 26th of November 1999.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE MANAGEMENT UNIT

Experts' Meeting on the Conservation of Malta's Megalithic Temples

In May 1999, the Ministry of Education convened an international meeting of experts aimed at defining some of the conservation challenges that are being faced on Malta's megalithic sites and possible strategies to respond to these challenges. The meeting was attended by representatives of ICOMOS and ICCROM, specialists from the universities of Malta, Florence and Karlsruhe, as well as the Restoration Unit of the Works Division and other interested parties. During the four-day meeting, an intensive debate developed, drawing on past experiences in various countries in order to identify challenges, possible pitfalls and practical solutions. A number of recommendations were made at the end of the meeting, which are now being implemented.

Conservation of Megalithic Temple Sites

In fulfillment of part of the recommendations of the Experts' Meeting, the Museums Department issued a public call in June 1999 to engage the services of an architectural firm to conduct a condition survey of the principal temple sites, to identify threatened areas, and to design a detailed plan of action giving priority to the most vulnerable sectors. By the end of 1999, the selected consultants had completed their preliminary survey of Hagar Qim, Mnajdra, Ggantija and Tarxien, which included an endoscopic survey using the equipment given as emergency assistance by UNESCO. The first interim report on this work was submitted by the consultants in December 1999.

Improvements at Hagar Qim

Improvements of the infrastructure at Hagar Qim were continued, with further work aimed at protecting the site

in a visitor-friendly manner. Following the installation of a new fence at the end of 1998, the old boundary wall was removed in 1999. This secured the site from intruders, while visually liberated the site. Another intervention during the year was the installation of a timber walk-way along the main axis through the principal temple structure at Hagar Qim. This allows visitors to flow through safely without treading on delicate surfaces. The external circuit of the monument was also roped off, drastically reducing visitor impact.

Hypogeum Conservation Project

Work on this project came to a standstill during the first five months of 1999, because of an extensive review of the design of the walkways and railings within the complex. The result of this discussion was that, because of safety considerations and the generally low light levels which must be maintained on this site, suitable and desirable hand-rails were installed.

EXPO 2000

Under the aegis of a EUROMED initiative, the Museums Department participated in an exhibition affiliated to EXPO 2000 and organised by the city of Hildesheim. The theme of the exhibition was the application of technology for the conservation of the cultural heritage. Around 14 countries from Europe and the Mediterranean littoral were partners in this initiative. The Museums Department presented the Hypogeum Project.

Weed Control Programme

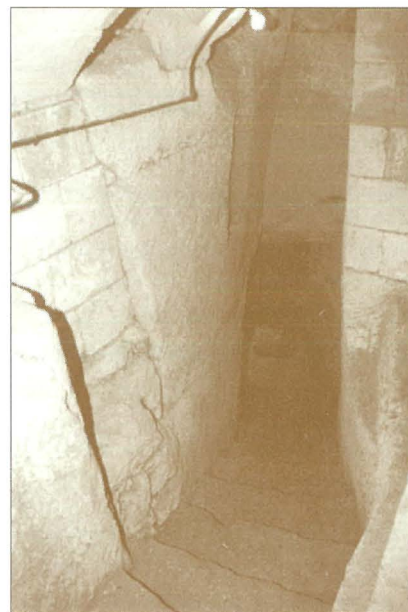
A small team of gardeners was deployed to implement a programme of weed control on various sites, including a number not open to the public at present. These sites include San Pawl Milqi, Tas-Silġ, the area behind the Museum of Roman Antiquities, and the temples at Ta' Hagra and Skorba. The major aims of the programme were to facilitate visual access to archaeological features, while preventing damage through the action of roots or foliage. The combined action of manual cutting and string cutters and, in particular, the regular use of herbicide has yielded very good results.

HERITAGE INFORMATION MANAGEMENT UNIT

Archaeological Excavations at the Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu

The Unit finished its excavations at the Inquisitor's Palace. The excavations in the garden revealed some 18th Century garden features such as pathways. Moreover, it was determined that the area had been quarried in the 18th century. This quarrying had removed all traces of structures preceding the 18th century, such as the foundations of the 17th century prison cells known to have existed on site. Further work at the Palace

consisted in the clearing of a 19th century dump of building material in the basement. This produced a large collection of baroque architectural elements including parts of a Latin inscription and a slab with a heraldic lion in relief.



A cleared up stairwell in the basement of the Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu

Catacombs at Hal-Far

A set of catacombs was reported during building operations at Hal-Far. Investigation by this Unit was carried out, including the clearing of the catacombs themselves, together with their recording. The catacomb had been severely damaged, probably during the building of the Hal-Far Airfield, in a manner that has completely destroyed the upper part of the catacomb complex. The remains of the catacomb were enough, however, to detect that it consisted of three different chambers accessed



Remains of catacombs discovered at Hal Far

through a common shaft, one of which appears to be of an earlier date than the rest. The catacomb complex had moreover been disturbed by the cutting of a large vaulted cistern. This cistern had also been abandoned at some

point, and was found full of debris containing a large amount of architectural features. These might very well belong to the 18th Century Sant Anglu ta' Hal-Far Chapel and Villa which are recorded to have been demolished with the building of the airfield. What remains of the catacombs was preserved and incorporated in the grounds of the property under development.

Archaeological excavations at Tas-Silġ

For another year the Unit was involved in the superintendence of the archaeological investigations carried out at the multi-period site of Tas-Silġ. The northern part continued to be re-evaluated by the *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta*, while excavations at the southern part of the site were resumed by the University of Malta.

Catacombs in Rabat

A catacomb cluster was discovered in the Tad-Dejr area during building operations. Investigation and recording of these catacombs was done in collaboration with Planning Authority EMU personnel. This catacomb cluster had been heavily tampered with over the years, the main change being the cutting of all the rock features within the extent of the cluster. It is interesting to note that this was done in order to re-utilize the space for agricultural purposes. Mangers and other related features were incorporated within the new set-up. A second major intervention was the cutting of a corridor towards the ridge face where the entrance to the catacombs must have been, in order to use the space as a World War II shelter.



Catacomb remains as discovered in Tad-Dejr Area, Rabat

The Unit also carried out the monitoring of the investigations of a number of Roman catacombs underlying the Wignacourt Collegiate Museum. These works revealed a particularly elegant example of catacombs having a triclinium and two baldacchino tombs. Another interesting discovery was a cluster of catacombs which had been heavily modified and re-utilized for agricultural purposes. This was a similar example to the earlier discovery in the Tad-Dejr area.

Survey at Ghajn Klieb, Rabat

An extensive survey of the Ghajn Klieb area was carried out in collaboration with the University of Malta. The site contains a large scatter of classical rock-cut tombs as well as several other features including relatively recent underground chambers and cisterns related to agriculture, a furnace, and military/defense related structures.

Discovery of 17th century soffit belonging to St John's Co-Cathedral

During renovation works at the Bank of Valletta branch in St John Street, a wooden soffit was exposed. Investigation of this discovery was carried out in conjunction with the Museum of Fine Arts, mainly based on the study of early paintings and documentation regarding the Co-Cathedral. It was discovered that the soffit had belonged to the former Prior's Apartment, dating to the mid-17th century, at the time forming part of the Conventual Church of St John. Buildings of similar nature have since been heavily disturbed, including the part of the building in question.

Investigations at Xarolla

The investigation of the catacomb complex at Xarolla was continued by clearing two lines of service trenches which had probably been dug in the 1950s, cutting right through the site. The cleaning of these trenches resulted in the exposure of the entrances of the tombs which had been discovered in 1996. Some other features, which might well be related to other tombs, have been uncovered in the course of the clearing works.

Archaeological excavations at Gozo Cathedral

During renovation works being carried out beneath the Gozo Cathedral belfry, workers came upon a number of artifacts consisting of ceramic bowls, a trough, a broken oil lamp and a clay smoking pipe and some other modern artifacts. Thereafter, Museum personnel carried out an archaeological excavation which resulted in the retrieval of a number of deposits of recent historical date. It was concluded that these deposits belonged to a dump of waste material, almost certainly from the Cathedral church itself, gathered over several years.

Investigations at Tas-Srug, Xaghra, Gozo

The Unit was involved in the investigation of a site at Tas-Srug in Xaghra, which was being threatened by development. The site extended on a natural inland ridge, and contained a number of interesting features, including natural caves, some of which had been utilized for agricultural purposes. These caves were excavated and recorded. The investigation also resulted in the identification of other features related to agriculture, including a system of water channelling and collecting and a rural room entirely dug out of a loose stone block.

Byzantine Ceramic Survey

The unit continued the re-assessment of the collection of archaeological materials in the archives of the Museum of Archaeology. A survey of the amphorae within the collection was carried out in full collaboration with Dott. Brunella Bruno of the Italian Archaeological Mission. This survey yielded impressive new information with the identification of an extensive presence of Byzantine material, hitherto overlooked in the Maltese Islands.

Survey of Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour

The first phase of a systematic survey of the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour was carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Nautical Archaeology of the University of Texas. This first phase consisted mainly of reconnaissance, aiming at a general examination of the Valletta Harbours through remote sensing and diver inspections. Priority was given to selected sections of the harbours that had not been dredged, namely Dockyard Creek, the main channel of the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour. An area consisting of a pile of uniform round-shaped features was detected at Dockyard Creek. Inspection of this site determined that the features were buried in the silt bottom of the Harbour. Another interesting discovery was an anchor stock. In the main channel of the Grand Harbour two possible shipwreck sites were located. The area also has a concentration of round-shaped features, which are likely to be ballast piles. Examination of Marsamxett Harbour, focusing around Manoel Island, yielded a number of finds including clay pipes, musket balls, and various ceramic artifacts. It is planned to continue this survey of the Harbours, possibly extending the project to the sea bed around the Maltese Islands.

ACQUISITIONS AND BEQUESTS

Amphora from Comino

An amphora (CMN1999/1) was retrieved from San Niklaw Bay, Comino, and handed over to the Museum by the Management of the Comino Hotel. Being complete, and in a very good state of preservation, this amphora proved to be a highly important find. It has been dated to the 4th/3rd centuries BC and is



Amphora retrieved from San Niklaw Bay, Comino

probably of south Italian origin. This type of amphora is quite rare and it is the first one of its kind to be included in the Museum collection. The amphora is undergoing scientific conservation, after which it is planned to put it on exhibition.

Coins

Two coins were acquired for the Museum of Archaeology through the Captain O.F. Gollcher Foundation. One of the coins is Carthaginian (MDN1999/1) and shows the head of Tanit on the obverse and a standing horse on the reverse. The other coin is late Roman (MDN1999/2) and shows a bust of Agrippina on the obverse and a *carpentum* drawn by two mules on the reverse. Both these coins are reported to have been retrieved in the late 19th Century during construction works at Cathedral Square, Mdina.

Artifact from Skorba

Part of a stylized lobed object (SK1999/1) was discovered on the surface at Skorba, Mgarr, by Ms Sabrina Borda. The artifact was handed over to the Museum. It has been established by Dr David Trump that it is indeed neolithic. Similar artifacts have been discovered in Tarxien and published in Evans J. D. (T/P 1016).

Axe-head from Mistra

An axe-head (MST1999/1), which is almost certainly prehistoric, was handed over to the Museum in November by Dr Hans Joachim Bodenbach. An examination by geologist Dr Peter Gatt indicates that the axe-head is made of polished basalt, probably of Sicilian origin. It was found embedded in a rubble wall along the road of Mistra Valley. A brief survey of the area failed to produce



Axe-head discovered at Mistra

further prehistoric material. It was confirmed by Dr David Trump that similar axe-heads are known from Temple Period sites in the Maltese Islands

Scavi e ricerche della Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta

Antonia Ciasca, Maria Pia Rossignani
Gli scavi a Tas-Silġ e San Pawl Milqi

A partire dal 1996 sono riprese sul terreno le ricerche della Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta, diretta da Antonia Ciasca in collaborazione con Maria Pia Rossignani. Partecipano ai lavori della Missione équipes di studiosi e ricercatori di tre Università italiane: l'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" (responsabile Antonia Ciasca), l'Università Cattolica di Milano (responsabile Maria Pia Rossignani), l'Università degli Studi di Lecce (responsabile Grazia Semeraro), con il concorso di specialisti del Ministero dei Beni Culturali nonché di Enti e Laboratori di ricerca di diverse città italiane. L'attività della Missione è resa possibile dalla attiva collaborazione di tutto lo staff del Museums Department of Malta e in particolare di Anthony Pace, Nathaniel Cutajar, Reuben Grima e dal sostegno dell'Ambasciatore d'Italia, Giancarlo Riccio e dell'Addetto culturale Rosanna Cravenna.

La Missione Archeologica Italiana è attiva a Malta dal 1963, anno in cui ebbero inizio le indagini intraprese grazie ai finanziamenti dell'Università di Roma, successivamente anche con il sostegno del C.N.R. Le ricerche, allora dirette dal prof. Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo dell'Università Cattolica di Milano, dal prof. Sabatino Moscati dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" e da ultimo dalla prof.ssa Antonia Ciasca, hanno visto nel corso degli anni la partecipazione di studiosi di diverse competenze, delle due Università e di varie Soprintendenze Archeologiche. Il programma elaborato era finalizzato alla conoscenza della cultura storica dell'arcipelago, allora ancora trascurata a vantaggio dei tradizionali studi sulla Preistoria delle isole maltesi. Oggetto della ricerca sono state dunque le testimonianze della cultura fenicia e punica, romana, tardoromana e bizantina.

Volumi monografici hanno dato annualmente ampi resoconti preliminari dei risultati delle indagini della Missione che aveva aperto diversi cantieri di scavo nell'arcipelago maltese: a Tas-Silġ, a S. Pawl Milqi e a Ras-il-Wardija, nell'isola di Gozo (*MM 1963 – 1970*).

I risultati del ciclo di scavi allora condotti e degli studi successivi, confermando l'importanza per la storia del Mediterraneo dei siti indagati, hanno suggerito l'impianto di un nuovo programma di ricerca, a Tas-Silġ e S. Pawl Milqi. Gli scavi sono finanziati dal Ministero dell'Università e della Ricerca Scientifica e Tecnologica e fruiscono di un contributo del Ministero per gli Affari Esteri.

Nell'attuale fase della sua attività la Missione ritiene opportuno portare all'attenzione di un più vasto pubblico i risultati preliminari delle sue ricerche. In tale prospettiva la ripresa dei lavori a Malta si inserisce all'interno di un più ampio e organico progetto che, attraverso la collaborazione tra gli Atenei coinvolti e il Museums Department of Malta, prevede il ricorso a metodologie e tecnologie di intervento sperimentate in Italia per la valorizzazione di siti di grande interesse archeologico. Al completamento delle indagini sul campo, attualmente in corso, tale progetto affianca iniziative quali la realizzazione di mostre (a Malta, in Italia e in altri paesi europei), pubblicazioni di carattere divulgativo e altre forme di informazione che facciano uso di strumenti multimediali.

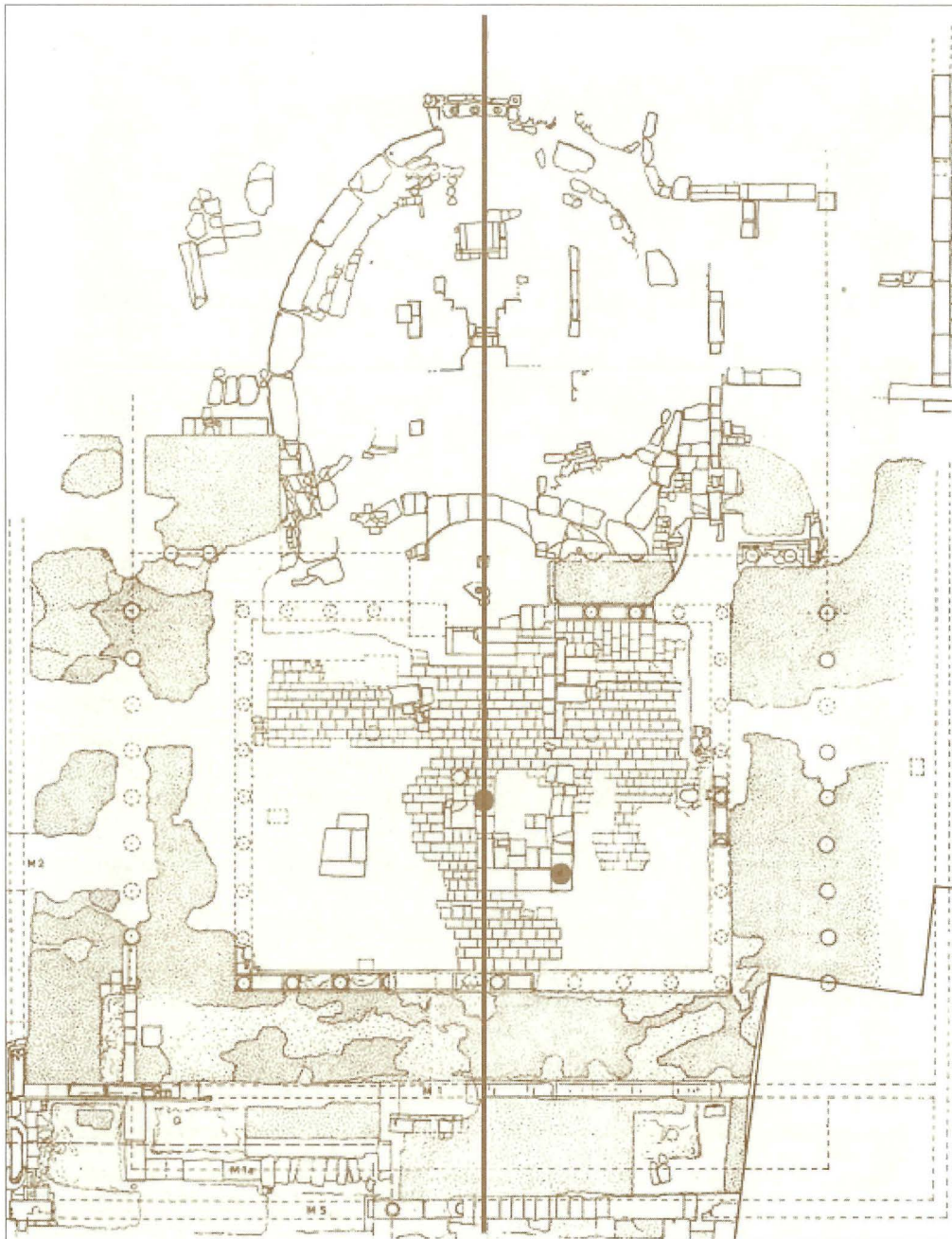
Grazie alla consulenza dell'Istituto Centrale per il Restauro è stato elaborato un progetto di restauro e musealizzazione dei due siti archeologici, che permetta al più presto di renderli aperti al pubblico. Un iniziale finanziamento straordinario del Ministero degli Affari Esteri consentirà di dare finalmente avvio, nel mese di novembre 2000, alle opere di restauro e conservazione delle strutture del santuario di Tas-Silġ.

I. TAS-SILĠ

1. *Inquadramento storico*

Il movimento di espansione fenicia, archeologicamente documentabile a partire da Cipro dall' XI secolo a.C., ha rappresentato un fenomeno storico di particolare rilievo per la cultura del Mediterraneo. Per suo tramite sono stati introdotti dall'Oriente i fondamenti essenziali per lo sviluppo della civiltà occidentale: l'alfabeto, nuove tecnologie specializzate (ad esempio nella lavorazione dei metalli), modelli di organizzazione urbana, sistemi produttivi ed economici adatti a comunità numerose e articolate. In tale processo storico un ruolo di primaria importanza è stato svolto da alcuni grandi santuari, deputati non solo al culto e all'elaborazione di ideologie religiose, ma anche centri di potere economicamente attivi in quanto luoghi di deposito e gestione di imponenti ricchezze e archivi di conoscenze. Dei grandi santuari fenici ricordati dalle fonti letterarie antiche – quello di Tiro in Fenicia, di Lixus in Marocco, di Cadice, di Erice – nulla o poco è giunto fino a noi; d'altronde della stessa Cartagine pochissimo è al presente noto.

A Malta si trova quello che è a tutt'oggi l'unico grande santuario fenicio coloniale documentato dai resti materiali. Localizzato nella contrada agricola denominata Tas-Silġ, godeva di completa autonomia rispetto agli abitati dell'isola: la sua posizione, su di un



Tas-Silg Pianta dell'area centrale del santuario con indicazione dei due depositi di fondazione dell'Orizzonte 5. La linea indica l'asse del complesso templare.

rilievo modesto ma ben visibile dal mare, a poca distanza dalla vasta baia di Marsaxlokk, principale porto antico dell'isola aperto a sud, ne segnala il ruolo di grande santuario internazionale, a mezza via sulle rotte marittime fra Oriente e Occidente; al tempo stesso la sua posizione isolata e dominante e la struttura complessiva di luogo fortificato ne rivela la essenziale funzione di custodia di beni.

Impiantato nella seconda metà dell'VIII sec. a.C. sfruttando le strutture murarie di un complesso templare megalitico dell'Eneolitico maltese (fase di Tarxien), venne dedicato alla dea Astarte, la maggiore divinità del pantheon fenicio, assimilata successivamente alla greca Hera e alla romana Giunone. Sottoposto a opere di rinnovamento e di ricostruzione anche attraverso il concorso dei fedeli, secondo quanto testimoniano le sue

numerose iscrizioni, il santuario muterà nei secoli il suo aspetto, sempre accentrato attorno alla struttura templare preistorica; punto di incontro fra culture diverse (indigena, fenicia, greca) assumerà nei secoli un singolare stile architettonico composito.

La fama e la ricchezza del luogo di culto, ben note nell'antichità, furono tali da suscitare l'avidità di molti. L'episodio più noto è quello che vede protagonista Verre, processato nel 70 a.C.; nell'accusa, sostenuta da Cicerone (*in Verr.*, II, 5, 184) si fa esplicito riferimento al saccheggio sacrilego compiuto dal propretore della Sicilia ai danni del vetusto santuario di Giunone a Malta, celebre e ricco solo come quello di Hera a Samo. Anche dopo questo episodio rovinoso, la vita del santuario continuò, protraendosi in età romana imperiale e ancora in epoca bizantina, quando la parte centrale del luogo

sacro, dove si trovavano i successivi altari, rimase adibita al culto, come testimonia la presenza di un battistero: singolare e rara testimonianza di continuità di destinazione di un luogo sacro. Il sito risulta avere notevole importanza nel periodo arabo e ancora in quello normanno.

2. Le indagini del passato e la strategia di intervento attuale

Il sito di Tas-Silġ è stato esplorato con indagini archeologiche condotte in successive campagne di scavo dal 1963 al 1970. A partire dal 1970, con finanziamenti sempre più esigui che per diversi anni sono venuti a mancare, la ricerca si è concentrata sul censimento della grande quantità di reperti e sulla definizione delle fasi edilizie dell'eccezionale monumento.

Nel 1993, su richiesta del Museums Department of Malta, è stato elaborato un progetto di sistemazione e fruizione dell'area archeologica, che prevede anche lo spostamento dell'attuale strada Marsaxlokk-Zejtun che oggi taglia in due il santuario: tale progetto, aggiornato nel 1995, è stato messo a punto attraverso una collaborazione fra docenti dell'Università di Roma "La Sapienza" e funzionari del Ministero dei Beni Culturali. Negli anni 1994-1996 è stata affrontata, in accordo e con il supporto del Museums Department, l'organizzazione dei nuovi magazzini collocati all'interno della linea di fortificazione ottocentesca della



Tas-Silġ Veduta generale dell'area centrale del santuario dopo gli interventi del 1997.

Cottonera, al fine di facilitare l'opera di catalogazione e studio dei reperti da parte dei diversi specialisti coinvolti nella ricerca, in vista della edizione definitiva.

Prendendo le mosse dal nucleo fondamentale di dati già raccolti e dalle problematiche e ipotesi storico-archeologiche messe a fuoco dai lavori del passato trentennio, è stato formulato un progetto "in prosecuzione", che rappresenti anche un aggiornamento

dello studio nelle forme più appropriate a un sito dell'importanza e della complessità – dal punto di vista sia storico sia stratigrafico – di Tas-Silġ. La nuova fase di lavori si avvale di due fondamentali elementi di vantaggio: da un lato le rinnovate metodologie di indagine, sia sul terreno sia negli studi ceramologici, e dall'altro l'attuale patrimonio di conoscenze archeologiche sul mondo fenicio e punico, oggi certamente più che decuplicate rispetto alla situazione degli anni '60. Il programma è finalizzato ad una più approfondita conoscenza del santuario nella sua forma archeologica e alla valutazione complessiva del suo ruolo storico nell'ambito dell'area sud-mediterranea, privilegiato punto di contatto fra culture diverse.

A partire dal 1996 sono dunque ripresi i lavori sul campo. Nell'ambito della totale estensione del complesso di culto, le indagini si sono finora concentrate sulla parte settentrionale del sito. La chiave per la comprensione archeologica e storica del monumento è infatti racchiusa proprio nel nucleo centrale del santuario sull'alto della collina rocciosa, legato fin dal suo inizio alla struttura templare preistorica, insieme alle aree circostanti destinate allo svolgimento del culto, con gli altari e le installazioni per i diversi riti collegati all'offerta.

Il settore a sud della strada moderna Marsaxlokk-Zejtun, dove attualmente è in corso uno scavo condotto dall'Università di Malta, comprende i margini del luogo sacro, con sostruzioni e terrazzamenti di varia epoca, interessati da scarichi di materiale votivo, effettuati in coincidenza con le opere di rinnovamento edilizio delle strutture del complesso sommitale. Per questa area il programma di ricerca prevede, nell'immediato, una riflessione sui numerosi dati recuperati nel corso delle passate indagini e, a breve termine, una serie mirata di interventi di scavo.

Relativamente dunque all'area settentrionale del sito è stato redatto un programma di controlli stratigrafici nei punti che si ritengono dotati di maggiore potenzialità informativa per la lettura delle diverse fasi di occupazione e di monumentalizzazione del santuario. I controlli sono eseguiti utilizzando tecniche appropriate alle differenti situazioni: rilevamento e analisi

delle pareti stratigrafiche in sezione lungo le trincee di depreazione e saggi di estensione differenziata mirati alla migliore definizione della cronologia dei successivi interventi edilizi nel complesso monumentale. È stato avviato e verrà completato nel 2001 un nuovo rilievo topografico generale che, anche mediante l'utilizzo di tecniche informatiche, consentirà la realizzazione e il posizionamento delle piante di dettaglio.

La ricomposizione delle planimetrie e degli alzati pertinenti alle prime fasi fenicie del santuario è stata uno dei primi obiettivi, affrontato per ora con interventi nell'area antistante il lobo della costruzione megalitica che rimarrà in uso per tutta l'età storica (d'ora in poi indicato come "tempio"), tecnicamente limitati dalle solide pavimentazioni del periodo tardo-ellenistico, pertinenti a una corte circondata sui quattro lati da portici.

Le aree individuate come quelle più significative e sulle quali è stata riaperta la ricerca sono attualmente dieci:

- Area I resto di struttura a blocchi al centro della corte
- Area II trincea di depreazione del colonnato est, comprendente la zona dell'altare arcaico
- Area III trincea di depreazione del colonnato sud
- Area IV trincea di depreazione del colonnato nord
- Area V trincea di depreazione nel pavimento del portico sud
- Area VI angolo sud-ovest della corte
- Area VII cisterna all'interno della corte e strutture connesse
- Area VIII area a ovest della corte
- Area IX area interna al vano orientale del tempio megalitico
- Area X area nord-orientale del santuario, presso gli "altari" 38 e 43.

Le indagini finora svolte hanno prodotto risultati di straordinario interesse, che permettono significative integrazioni ai dati già disponibili, aprendo nel contempo nuove prospettive di ricerca.

3. Profilo delle vicende edilizie del santuario

La storia del complesso monumentale si svolge su di un arco di tempo molto lungo; al suo interno vanno riconosciute periodizzazioni cronologiche e culturali che possono opportunamente indicarsi con il termine ampio di "orizzonti", a loro volta ulteriormente frazionabili in periodi e fasi.

Gli *orizzonti 1 - 2* si riferiscono all'età preistorica con le culture tipiche dell'Arcipelago Maltese: il primo all'Età del Rame (fase di Tarxien) e il secondo all'Età del Bronzo (principalmente fase di Borg-in-Nadur).

In età storica, gli *orizzonti 3 - 5* comprendono le fasi fenicie, dagli inizi della documentazione archeologica relativa (seconda metà VIII / inizi VII sec. a.C.) fino all'ellenismo, mentre si indica come *orizzonte 6* l'età tardo-ellenistica (fine II – I sec. a.C.).

All'*orizzonte 7*, romano-imperiale, e all'*orizzonte 8*, bizantino, fanno seguito gli *orizzonti 9 - 10*, con documenti di cultura araba, normanna, medievale che raggiungono il secolo XVII (*orizzonte 11*).

All'*orizzonte 12* sono assegnate le fasi di spoliazioni moderne, finalizzate al recupero di materiali da costruzione, che hanno avuto luogo in particolare nel corso dei secoli XVIII e XIX.

Va preliminarmente segnalato che uno dei problemi di base della ricerca sta nel fatto che ogni ricostruzione per fasi cronologiche dovrebbe – in linea di principio – tenere conto delle preesistenze monumentali della collina di Tas-Silġ, principalmente i grandiosi complessi architettonici megalitici risalenti alla fase di Tarxien. Purtroppo questa esigenza metodologica è destinata a rimanere in gran parte teorica: in effetti è ormai evidente che la struttura generale del santuario storico attualmente visibile – con il tempio che è una costruzione "triloba" eneolitica, circondato da ampie aree aperte con altari e installazioni varie, porticati, ecc. — è il risultato finale di un lento processo durato secoli, caratterizzato da periodi di intense attività edilizie, fondamentalmente a spese degli edifici preistorici che occupavano inizialmente il sito. In coincidenza con ciascuno dei programmi di rinnovamento del santuario, certo numerosi, questi furono gradualmente smantellati, per acquisire disponibilità di spazi e di materiale da costruzione. Dai resti conservati sul terreno è infatti ancora ben evidente che i blocchi dei grandi muri di età fenicia fino all'ellenismo sono in realtà monoliti preistorici rilavorati.

Notevoli sono anche le difficoltà di lettura stratigrafica: la lunga durata delle strutture, lo scarsissimo interro e la vastità e profondità degli interventi di depreazione, che hanno creato interruzioni e discontinuità nei rapporti fisici fra elementi in alzato, livelli pavimentali e strati, costituiscono altrettanti limiti alla messa in fase delle evidenze.

Si illustrano di seguito le principali acquisizioni raggiunte attraverso le verifiche effettuate negli anni 1996 - 1998 e relative alle vicende costruttive comprese fra il primo periodo fenicio e l'età tardo-ellenistica



Tas-Silġ Orizzonte 4: L'altare a tavola.

(orizzonti 3 – 6); a parte vengono presentati i risultati della campagna 1999. La campagna 2000 verrà effettuata nei mesi di ottobre/novembre.

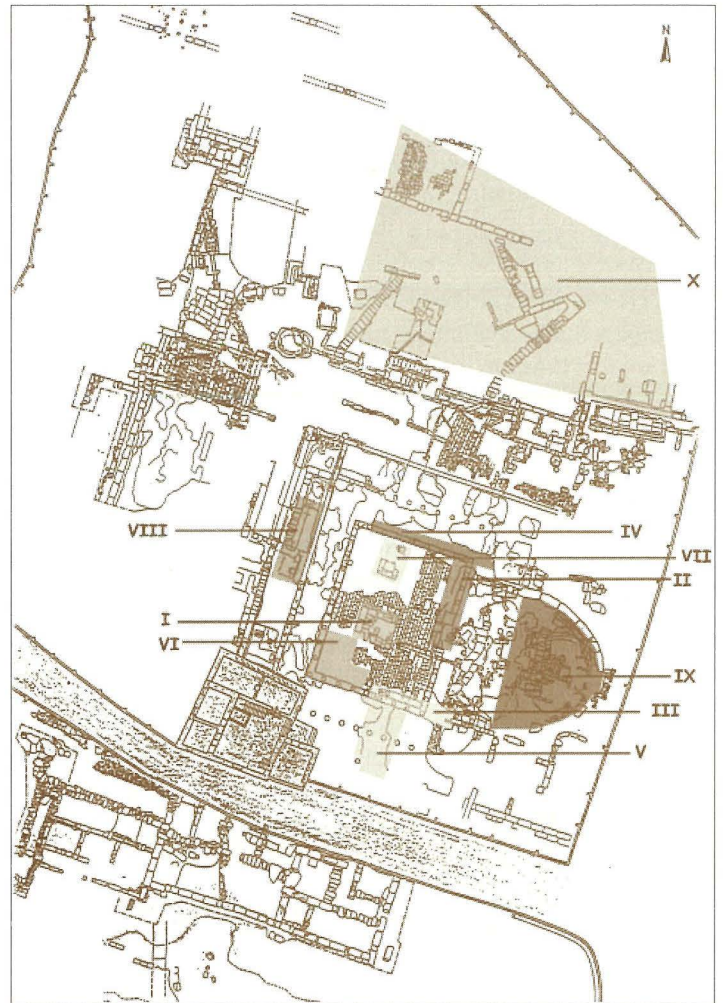
Alcune evidenze, per ora limitate, di frequentazione culturale potrebbero essere pertinenti a fasi protostoriche successive all'orizzonte 2: sono costituite da un deposito fortemente organico con tracce di attività negative e particolari concentrazioni di ceramica ad impasto.

Potrebbe collegarsi a questa fase un reperto di provenienza sporadica, proveniente dalla trincea di depreazione del porticato ellenistico settentrionale. Si tratta di un disco di terracotta a impasto grigiastro e superficie rossa che reca l'impressione di un piede su di una faccia e quella di una mano sull'altra. Per dimensioni, piede e mano si adatterebbero a un lattante molto giovane; le impronte sono state ottenute appoggiando gli arti direttamente sull'argilla fresca e il loro contorno è rilevato da una sottile ma decisa linea incisa. L'ocra rossa che ben si conserva nelle impronte era stata verosimilmente spalmata su mano e piede. Questo singolare documento si riferisce ad attività umane e ideologie la cui valutazione dovrà indubbiamente avvalersi delle metodologie degli studi storico-religiosi oltre che di quelle tradizionali della archeologia.

Orizzonte 3. A questo orizzonte appartengono livelli identificati per lo più in sezione in vari punti (aree II, IV, VI, VII, VIII), costituiti da un deposito fortemente organico e varia ceramica. Fra i pochi materiali finora prelevati da tali livelli risulta particolarmente significativa l'associazione di frammenti di vasi con tecnica a *red-slip* di tradizione fenicia unitamente a un frammento di tipo protocorinzio di importazione: i contesti sembrano da collocare a cavallo tra la fine dell'VIII sec. a.C. e l'inizio del secolo successivo.

Allo stato attuale, si può ritenere che la primissima presenza fenicia, nonostante la frequentazione del luogo sacro da parte dei nuovi venuti, non abbia portato variazioni o aggiunte alle strutture risalenti alla cultura di Tarxien, con ogni probabilità allora perfettamente conservate, né all'assetto generale dell'area. Il tempio e lo spazio antistante si collocano sulla dorsale rocciosa ad andamento E-O, in assoluto il punto più alto della collina; l'area anteposta alla facciata curvilinea del tempio è già in età preistorica uno spazio aperto e tale rimarrà fino all'età bizantina: uno spazio legato alla sfera religiosa e sociale della collettività. Sembra che la superficie della roccia sia rimasta allo stato naturale non solo nel corso di tutta la preistoria, ma anche nel primo periodo fenicio.

Orizzonte 4. Le proposte di ricostruzione già precedentemente presentate (CIASCA 1976-77, pp. 162-172; CIASCA 1999, pp. 24-25) si riferiscono alle prime



Tas-Silg Pianta generale del complesso monumentale, con indicazione delle aree indagate dal 1997.

attività di ricostruzione e di adattamento attribuibili ai Fenici e possono ora essere integrate da altri dati. In via preliminare, per esse sembra proponibile una cronologia nell'ambito del VI secolo a.C., a iniziare forse dalla fine del VII.

Lo spazio contenuto entro la facciata concava del tempio viene delimitato da due ante rettilinee con pilastri terminali ai lati un passaggio centrale della larghezza di m. 6,30 ca. Sull'asse del tempio è il più antico altare di



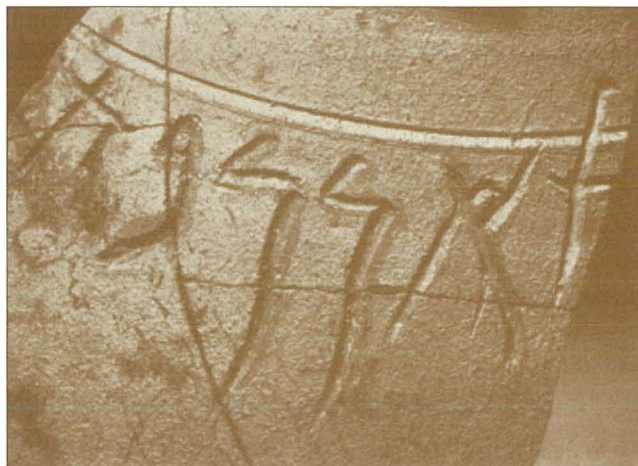
Tas-Silg. Area I, Orizzonte 5: il deposito di fondazione del monumento.

età storica individuato, certamente in disuso e obliato nell'orizzonte 6, quando viene lastricato il cortile. La sua struttura è a tavola, con piano a livello della roccia, e presenta incassi per l'alloggio di elementi verticali sul lato lungo verso il tempio, che doveva quindi essere chiuso. La struttura originaria viene sottoposta a successive modifiche, che interessano in particolare le spallette dei lati brevi. È certo che l'altare fosse destinato a offerte – probabilmente carnee – che venivano combuste, come rivelano le numerose tracce di bruciato sulla pietra. Il lungo uso della installazione può arguirsi dai restauri delle superfici corrose mediante intonacatura e dal rivestimento con lamina metallica fissata con chiodini di bronzo ancora in parte conservati.

Nell'ampio spiazzo antistante la facciata templare, una struttura quadrangolare a blocchi (monoliti preistorici rilavorati), anch'essa fondata sulla roccia e in cui è verosimilmente da riconoscere una cappella (area I), risulta ascrivibile allo stesso orizzonte cronologico; l'importanza attribuita al monumento è desumibile dall'accurato intonaco bianco delle sue pareti, secondo un uso noto nell'Occidente fenicio e nella stessa Malta (Ras il-Wardija). Nel cortile esiste un secondo monumento in blocchi squadrati, purtroppo ampiamente danneggiato dalle opere di depredazione moderna, eretto accanto alla imboccatura di una cisterna (area VII): anche se fra i due elementi strutturali non risulta possibile cogliere, allo stato attuale, rapporti stratigrafici diretti, è quasi certo che essi siano stati in relazione durante una o più fasi di vita del santuario, a iniziare dal periodo arcaico.

Orizzonte 5. In un momento posteriore, anche se cronologicamente non ancora precisabile, hanno luogo interventi di carattere unitario che interessano in particolare modo l'area antistante il tempio. La superficie rocciosa della collina viene infatti coperta (area VI, VII) da un pavimento in scaglie di calcare in cui è conservata una serie di impronte ben evidenti e profonde vari centimetri; nell'area VI esse, di forma rettangolare, sono disposte appaiate e sfalsate a coppie e formano almeno due allineamenti paralleli in senso est-ovest. Tali evidenze devono essere interpretate come alloggiamenti per elementi a pianta composita in altra materia (pietra?), forse verticali oppure di poco sopraelevati rispetto al battuto; non è possibile definirne con maggior precisione l'aspetto. Il pavimento su cui erano ricavate le impronte si addossa, coprendone l'intonaco di rivestimento, al filare basamentale del sacello precedentemente descritto, che risulta tuttavia rimanere in uso.

Mentre dunque l'arrivo dei Fenici poco o nulla all'inizio dovette incidere sull'assetto esistente e sulla definizione degli spazi, le fasi successive – pur conservandosi la costruzione templare preistorica e anzi sempre in stretto rapporto con essa – iniziano una nuova caratterizzazione



Tas-Silg Frammento di vaso con l'espressione [ŠTR?] T 'NN ("Astarte di Malta").

dell'area scoperta antistante la monumentale facciata. La roccia ha ora un battuto calcareo che ne uniforma le asperità e lo spazio, dominato dalla cappella centrale, è scandito da elementi in alzata di natura votiva e/o piccole installazioni di offerta.

La presenza di una serie di incassi rettangolari praticati nella roccia spianata, perfettamente allineati (individuati sul fondo delle trincee di depredazione dei colonnati ellenistici Ovest e Sud, area VI), segnala l'esistenza di una recinzione regolare a questo cortile: anche se allo stato attuale delle indagini la mancanza di relazioni stratigrafiche non consente di mettere tale delimitazione in rapporto con il battuto pavimentale sopra descritto, sicura appare l'intenzionalità della delimitazione dell'area scoperta centrale. Potrebbe dunque riconoscersi a Tas-Silg il definirsi di nuove specifiche utilizzazioni dello spazio sacro, il cui significato andrà analizzato sul doppio binario dell'ideologia religiosa e della tradizione architettonica vicino-orientale.

Il monumento centrale (area I) risulta interessato da una ristrutturazione. Nei blocchi del filare di base risultano praticate due cavità perfettamente circolari, ciascuna contenente una coppetta di ceramica di produzione fenicia locale, coperta da un'altra di diametro leggermente inferiore rovesciata a costituire una sorta di coperchio; le coppette contenevano in un caso offerte verosimilmente di materia organica deperibile e nell'altro un frammento di anello di bronzo a castone ovale e il resto di un elemento in ferro non meglio precisabile. Si tratta con ogni probabilità di depositi di fondazione, certo relativi alla ristrutturazione del monumento, di cui si traccia alla martellina sui resti precedenti il perimetro del nuovo alzata: rivelatore in questo senso può essere anche lo stato frammentario dell'anello così accuratamente preservato. È in particolare estremamente significativa la posizione del deposito settentrionale, in quanto perfettamente allineato

all'asse del tempio preistorico; l'altro deposito era collocato nell'angolo SO della struttura. L'eccezionale importanza del ritrovamento è dovuta da un lato alla rarità di confronti in ambito culturale fenicio, dall'altro alla possibilità di definizione cronologica della ristrutturazione del monumento, che è databile, sulla base delle coppette, al V sec. a. C.¹

L'asportazione degli elementi incassati nel battuto sembra segnare un momento di revisione dell'assetto dello spazio scoperto; a tale momento va connesso uno strato uniforme, costituito prevalentemente da ceneri e materiali carboniosi, disperso sulla superficie della



Tas-Silġ Area VI, Orizzonte 5:
le impronte riconosciute nel pavimento in battuto calcareo.

pavimentazione in scaglie di calcare (aree VI, VII). A un periodo compreso tra il IV sec. a.C. e la fine del II sec. a.C., appartiene una serie di livelli pavimentali sovrapposti; la limitatezza attuale delle indagini insieme alla scarsità di materiale datante rinvenuto nel loro spessore non permettono per il momento di puntualizzare con maggiore precisione la loro scansione cronologica. La presenza di più battuti comunque suggerisce l'idea che il santuario, almeno nell'area limitata allo spazio scoperto, sia stato oggetto di ristrutturazioni e costanti opere di manutenzione.

Orizzonte 6. Infine – negli ultimi anni del II/inizi del I sec. a.C. — lo spiazzo viene dotato di una solida pavimentazione in lastre di calcare, ancora conservata su quasi tutta l'area. Si tratta dell'ultimo intervento di età prebizantina nell'area scoperta antistante il tempio, certamente secondo un progetto di notevole impegno, come può desumersi anche dall'impiego di un tipo diverso di calcare non disponibile nelle vicinanze di Tas-Silġ. La corte lastricata viene ora racchiusa su tutti i lati da un portico di ordine dorico, a doppia navata sui lati nord e sud, pavimentato da un *opus signinum* in cui si dispongono regolarmente tessere di marmo bianco, chiaramente importato. Il lato del portico antistante la facciata del tempio viene a costituire una sorta di quinta

colonnata, che adotta capitelli di ordine corinzio. Nella corte dovette rimanere percepibile il segno dei più antichi monumenti (aree I, VII), anche se la conservazione delle sole fondazioni non consente ipotesi sulla forma degli elevati.

Sia il progetto architettonico, che trasforma lo spazio in una sorta di corte chiusa, sia la selezione degli ordini segnalano l'intervento di maestranze informate sulle sperimentazioni ellenistiche, che nello stesso periodo trasformano in senso monumentale i più antichi luoghi sacri dell'area mediterranea. La committenza di questo grandioso intervento, che risulta accompagnato da ampie opere di ristrutturazione nelle aree adiacenti, andrà verosimilmente cercata nel ceto dei *mercatores* italici, attratti dalle potenzialità economiche dell'isola, ormai entrata a fare parte del dominio romano, a controllo delle rotte mediterranee. Le evidenze monumentali non vanno infatti tenute disgiunte dai dati segnalati dai reperti, che registrano abbondanti importazioni di merci italiche a partire dagli stessi anni (v. più oltre, le ricerche sulle anfore di B. Bruno).

4. La campagna di scavo del 1999

Gli interventi hanno privilegiato le aree V, VIII, IX, X. Area V. L'indagine ha riguardato lo svuotamento della trincea di depreazione moderna con orientamento N-S (8 x 2 m ca.), che ha determinato lo sfondamento e l'asportazione di un ampio tratto del pavimento in *opus signinum* del portico meridionale. L'intervento, programmato in previsione dell'intervento di restauro, si è proposto di realizzare la lettura della stratigrafia sottostante la pavimentazione tardo-ellenistica e di comprendere la natura delle strutture asportate. La trincea di depreazione, che prosegue verso sud, fino a raggiungere il muro di recinzione moderno, è stata scavata per circa m. 8 di lunghezza.

Il potente interro moderno, che raggiungeva m. 1,80 di profondità fino alla superficie della roccia in declivio verso sud, era costituito da gettate caratterizzate dalla presenza di macerie (frammenti del pavimento in signino, schegge di blocchi) oltre che da materiali ceramici e fittili rimescolati. Documento dell'attività dei cavapietre è, fra l'altro, un cuneo di ferro ancora incastrato in un blocco di calcare rimasto nel riempimento.

È risultato possibile comprendere che le strutture asportate si riferivano alla complessa rete di canalizzazioni del santuario, funzionale alla raccolta e al deflusso delle acque: il tratto completamente asportato, alloggiato in una profonda trincea intenzionalmente tagliata nella roccia, aveva direzione N-S e pendenza verso sud ed era collegato a un tratto E-O di cui rimane un elemento, ricavato in un blocco di calcare, quasi certamente da mettere in relazione con una delle fasi

della vicina cisterna (per questa e le altre riserve d'acqua si veda *MM 1967*, p. 44). Sulla base dei dati archeologici disponibili, non è da escludere che l'importanza attribuita all'acqua a Tas-Silg sia da collegare non solo alle esigenze delle pratiche religiose, ma anche alla organizzazione del sito come luogo di rifugio collettivo, controllato dal gruppo sacerdotale, in periodi di emergenza: l'analisi e la comprensione del sistema idrico del santuario si delinea come un importante filone di ricerca.



Tas-Silg Frammento di pentola con l'abbreviazione LŠTRT, "di" o "per" Astarte.

La lettura della sequenza stratigrafica conservata dalle pareti della trincea ha consentito di documentare successivi momenti di frequentazione dell'area e fasi costruttive che precedono l'edificazione del portico e che andranno interpretate nel loro valore cronologico a fronte delle stratigrafie individuate nelle altre aree del santuario e dei saggi in estensione.

F. A., B. B.

Area VIII. L'area di scavo è situata nel corridoio che, nella ristrutturazione tardo-ellenistica, fungeva da elemento di raccordo fra gli ampi cortili occidentali e la corte porticata antistante il tempio. L'intervento aveva come obiettivo lo scavo in estensione di una residua "isola" stratigrafica (4 x 1,50 m), così ridotta a seguito di deprezzazioni successive all'abbandono del santuario e alla edificazione, in età moderna, di una casa i cui ruderi furono pressochè integralmente asportati negli scavi degli anni Sessanta (*MM 1968*, pp. 29-30, fig.1).

La pulizia delle sezioni, effettuata già nel 1998, aveva permesso una lettura della stratigrafia, che documentava una frequentazione a partire dalle fasi arcaiche del santuario (vedi sopra). L'intervento effettuato nel 1999 si è limitato all'asportazione della porzione residua delle strutture moderne e allo scavo di quattro livelli pavimentali sottostanti lo strato di preparazione della pavimentazione tardo-ellenistica, fino a raggiungere un piano in raffinato intonaco rosato di ottima fattura. La superficie è impermeabile e presenta un avvallamento

intenzionale, che suggerisce l'esistenza di un bacino; non risulta possibile, a causa delle trincee di spoliamento intorno alla "colonna" stratigrafica, formulare ipotesi più puntuali sulla natura di questo apprestamento, che potrebbe trovare giustificazione nella sua posizione, presso l'ingresso alla parte centrale del santuario. Lo scavo verrà condotto a termine nel corso della prossima campagna.

F. A., B. B.

Area IX. L'area comprende le strutture all'interno del vano di fondo del tempio megalitico, interessate da diverse fasi di utilizzo che spaziano cronologicamente dall'età preistorica al pieno medioevo (*MM 1966*, fig. 3, tav. 15-21).



Tas-Silg Disco in terracotta: uno dei lati reca l'impressione della mano di un infante.



Tas-Silg L'altra faccia dello stesso disco, con l'impressione di un piede.

L'indagine si è concentrata in particolare nella zona centrale del vano dove è ubicata una vasca, già individuata nel 1966 (*MM 1966*, pp. 34-35, "vaschetta

41”). La struttura, di forma quadrangolare (lati di m. 1,94, profonda 0,53 m), ha il bordo complanare al pavimento e circondato da una fila di lastre allungate conservate su tre lati. La superficie di tali lastre presenta fori per l’incasso di grappe metalliche e tracce di appoggio di elementi verticali. Le pareti interne della vasca conservano un sottile strato di malta sulla cui superficie si riconoscono tracce dell’adesione di lastre litiche. All’interno, i lati nord e sud presentano un gradino il cui piano, al momento del rinvenimento della struttura, conservava ancora frammenti di lastre di rivestimento di marmo, oggi non più visibili. Il fondo della vasca, costituito da una lastra di calcare, era rivestito da intonaco idraulico e presentava un foro a nord-est per lo scolo dell’acqua; purtroppo, a causa di azioni vandaliche, il fondo, integro al momento del rinvenimento, è stato gravemente danneggiato e la lastra ridotta in pezzi. Al di sotto è stata individuata un’altra vasca più antica, rettangolare e con lo stesso orientamento, scavata nella roccia; presso l’angolo nord-ovest di quest’ultima è presente una canaletta di adduzione che ne suggerisce una diversa funzione originaria. La vasca inferiore è stata comunque riutilizzata come bacino di contenimento dei depositi relativi all’uso di quella superiore.

L’area antistante al complesso presenta tracce di una pavimentazione in *sectilia* di lastre di marmo bianco e ardesia, disposte a formare un motivo geometrico a quadrati disposti in diagonale con triangoli inscritti. L’*opus sectile* risulta in fase con la realizzazione della vasca superiore: di estensione limitata, si raccorda con un precedente pavimento in scaglie di calcare, verosimilmente mantenuto in uso.

I depositi individuati sotto la lastra del fondo della vasca sono relativi sia all’uso sia all’abbandono della struttura; si tratta di livelli alternati di limo e sabbia a granulometria media e fine, generati dall’immissione e dal ristagno dell’acqua. Il dato più significativo emerso dallo scavo dei suddetti depositi è costituito dalla presenza, a quote differenti, di monete in bronzo, argento e una in oro (per un totale di 275), attualmente in fase di pulitura e restauro. Esse sono state rinvenute in veri e propri livelli praticamente a contatto l’uno con l’altro; la massima concentrazione è stata localizzata nella zona in corrispondenza del foro di scarico della vasca superiore. L’assenza di tracce riferibili ad un contenitore suggerisce l’idea che le monete siano “filtrate” nel deposito sottostante la vasca durante lo svuotamento della stessa, e che quindi vi fossero state originariamente gettate, verosimilmente in relazione al rito. L’analisi delle monete da parte di Claudia Perassi (Università Cattolica di Milano), che seguirà all’opera di pulitura e consolidamento attualmente in corso, fornirà dati sulla cronologia e sulla modalità d’uso della vasca. La moneta d’oro è un tremisse di Costantino IV, coniato tra il 670 e

il 674 d.C. dalla zecca di Siracusa (*DOC II/2*, p. 553, n. 59 bis).

I caratteri strutturali e la natura del riempimento sembrano quindi confermare l’ipotesi, già formulata negli anni Sessanta, che nel periodo bizantino il bacino sia stato utilizzato come vasca battesimale.²

A un’epoca molto più recente rispetto alla vasca si deve invece attribuire la sepoltura collocata a sud-ovest di essa, già individuata e scavata nel 1967 (*MM 1967*, p. 29, tav. 11, 1-3). Si tratta di un rozzo cassone composto da un resto di bacino cavato in un blocco di calcare cui è stato asportato uno dei lati brevi e sono stati aggiunti una lastra di fondo e tre spallette di prolungamento per contenere il corpo del defunto, un maschio adulto deposto con testa rivolta ad ovest. Nello strato coperto dalla lastra di fondo della tomba è stata rinvenuta una lastrina appartenente all’*opus sectile* connesso alla vasca battesimale, con chiare tracce di riutilizzo: il dato suggerisce quindi per la sepoltura una datazione a un momento in cui le strutture di culto della fase cui si riferisce il battistero erano ormai in disuso.

C. B.

Area X. L’indagine, nell’area nord-orientale del santuario, ha riguardato lo spazio compreso fra uno dei muri di delimitazione del santuario (muro D) e le strutture indicate con i numeri 38 e 43 (*MM 1966*, pp. 28-30, figg. 1-4; CIASCA 1993) al fine di recuperare, attraverso la revisione della stratigrafia e dei rilievi, dati cronologici più puntuali ed impostare nelle prossime campagne uno scavo estensivo. Si ricordi che le murature sia del *temenos* sia delle due strutture minori identificate come altari hanno subito ampie spoliazioni da parte dei cavapietre.

In particolare, oltre ad una pulizia accurata dell’area per rendere possibile la lettura puntuale di vecchie sezioni e strutture, si è operato su due fronti di intervento.

1. Si è impostato un saggio di 2,70 x 1,20 m all’esterno del muro D, con l’obiettivo di definirne la cronologia. È stato infatti individuato il suo cavo di fondazione, dal cui riempimento provengono una serie di materiali diagnostici (anfere commerciali Dressel 1A) riferibili al periodo fra la fine del II-inizi I a.C., contemporaneamente quindi alla fase che vede il grande progetto ultimo di monumentalizzazione del cortile centrale del santuario. Il cavo di fondazione del muro taglia un livello in blocchi e scaglie di pietra, riferibile ad una struttura anteriore e che corrisponde alla “prosecuzione” dell’altare 43; quest’ultimo quindi aveva un’estensione superiore a quella individuata negli scavi degli anni ’60. Verosimilmente anche l’altare 38 doveva essere anteriore a questa struttura di delimitazione del santuario, che è la più arretrata e fornita di una torre;

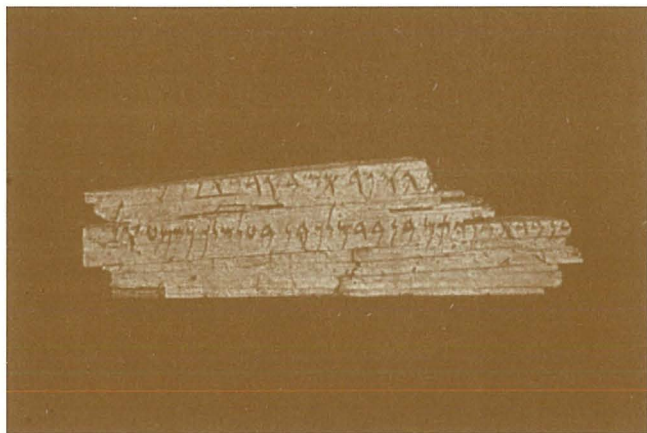
durante la pulizia della sezione a sud del muro D, è stato individuato il suo cavo di fondazione che taglia il pavimento dell'altare. Fondamentale risulterà l'indagine stratigrafica dei depositi che coprono il pavimento dell'altare, che consentirà di individuarne la dinamica di formazione e precisare sul piano cronologico la distinzione tra livelli pertinenti all'uso della struttura e quelli di obliterazione. Nell'area esterna al muro D non sono state individuate in questo punto tracce consistenti di frequentazione successiva a quella repubblicana, a parte un frammento di anfora bizantina con bollo.

2. La pulizia dell'area adiacente ad est dell'altare 43 ha messo in luce una buca nella quale è stato individuato uno scarico unitario di abbondante vasellame (anfore commerciali, ceramica comune e da fuoco) ed elementi metallici in piombo e ferro di cui non è possibile allo stato attuale fornire un'identificazione; si tratta di materiali relativi ad attività rituali riferibili, data la presenza di frammenti di anfore commerciali Lamboglia 2, Dressel 1 e Maña C2, alle fasi di età repubblicana.

g. s.

5. Ricerche e pubblicazioni

Ai fini dell'edizione scientifica definitiva dei risultati emersi nel corso degli scavi degli anni '60, che si pone come obiettivo la ricostruzione del panorama produttivo ed economico del santuario dalla preistoria all'età bizantina, è stato stabilito un programma articolato che,



Tas-Silg Iscrizione votiva frammentaria su placchetta in avorio (III sec. a.C.).

attraverso l'intervento di numerosi specialisti, prevede il completamento dello studio dei contesti ceramici. Si forniscono di seguito sintetiche anticipazioni sullo stato delle ricerche.

Le iscrizioni. Dal santuario provengono numerosi testi in lingua fenicia, che si scaglionano cronologicamente tra il V-IV e il I sec. a. C./I sec. d.C. circa. Consistono in una decina di iscrizioni



Tas-Silg. Area IX: l'area della vasca battesimale dopo le indagini del 1999.

votive su monumenti in calcare, placchette di osso o di avorio; inoltre sono attestate lettere incise su blocchi da costruzione (è sempre la stessa combinazione di due segni: HB). Le iscrizioni votive su pietra o altro materiale sono quasi tutte dediche alla dea Astarte, qualificata in qualche caso come Astarte di Malta (già GROTTANELLI 1982, pp. 105-108). L'epiteto della dea è la riprova epigrafica della funzione del santuario come grande centro culturale di tutta l'isola non legato a una città specifica.

Le iscrizioni incise su ceramica³ sono eseguite quasi tutte prima della cottura. Data la funzione culturale dei recipienti (e la natura votiva delle iscrizioni interpretabili) si deve presumere che i vasi fossero fabbricati appositamente nel santuario stesso o nelle sue immediate vicinanze. Tutta una serie di esempi con i testi incisi su pentole a impasto, su ciotole o piatti contiene una formula che significa "di Astarte" o "per Astarte". Queste iscrizioni hanno un preciso riscontro in alcune iscrizioni in lettere greche sempre incise e dipinte su ceramica con il nome di ΗΡΑΣ o ΗΕΡΑΙ (= genitivo e dativo "di Era" o "a Era"). In base a queste e alle dediche di oggetti votivi è stato possibile identificare il complesso culturale di Tas-Silg con il santuario dedicato ad Era citato da Tolomeo e con quello ricco e famoso ricordato da Cicerone che Verre avrebbe sacrilegamente spogliato (BORG 1963, pp. 41-51; COLEIRO 1963, pp. 25-38).

Oltre alle dediche ad Astarte si registrano altri tipi di formulari, disgraziatamente molto frammentari: spesso i segni sono sigle o abbreviazioni il cui significato non si può che presumere.

Delle iscrizioni era stata data ampia notizia nei rapporti preliminari dello scavo. Manca tuttavia un loro studio complessivo, sia per quanto riguarda le formule e i tipi di scrittura testimoniati, sia per quanto riguarda il

significato globale dei testi in funzione del culto di Astarte a Malta. A quanto consta in nessun santuario del Mediterraneo sono venuti in luce tanti recipienti ceramici iscritti. Il caso unico di Tas-Silġ va perciò documentato con particolare accuratezza: da una parte si potranno meglio cogliere le specificità del santuario di Malta nelle sue fasi ellenistiche, dall'altra l'insieme di Tas-Silġ potrà eventualmente costituire il primo esempio noto di usi che potrebbero essere riconosciuti altrove.

A partire dal 1994 è stata iniziata una schedatura sistematica delle iscrizioni, accompagnata dalla loro documentazione grafica e fotografica in vista della pubblicazione complessiva. Sono stati schedati circa 500 frammenti iscritti con la formula "di / per Astarte" (fenicio L 'ŠTRT) e più di 2000 con la sigla LT, che si suppone essere una abbreviazione della prima formula, costituita dalla prima e dall'ultima lettera della intera espressione. Così, almeno fino ad ora, si può affermare che il culto a Tas-Silġ era riservato principalmente alla dea Astarte, nonostante eventuali proposte, anche recenti, di individuare, accanto a questa divinità anche la dea Tinnit (questa è la vocalizzazione più verosimile del nome, sulla base di trascrizioni greche e di grafie tarde), il cui culto era molto diffuso in Africa settentrionale, soprattutto a Cartagine (FRENDO 1996, pp. 1127-1134). Un possibile paredro di Astarte a Tas-Silġ è il dio Milk 'ashart,⁴ una divinità non molto diversa da Milqart, il cui nome compare in una formula votiva incisa su un frammento di vaso.

È iniziato lo studio tipologico dei recipienti sui quali sono incise queste formule, in relazione anche con i contesti di rinvenimento. Queste informazioni, oltre a offrire un aiuto per la datazione dei testi, potrebbero dare chiarimenti sulla funzione dei vasi iscritti (v. i lavori in corso di A. Quercia).

Mentre prosegue la schedatura e la documentazione delle iscrizioni, si è cercato di dividere i documenti a seconda del modo di esecuzione e di specifiche espressioni ricorrenti. È stato così possibile individuare alcune varietà di scrittura e testi incisi con tecniche particolari e simili per contenuto. La forma dei segni delle iscrizioni votive è, con variazioni a seconda della cronologia e della cura nella esecuzione, quella tipica della cosiddetta scrittura punica, attestata con forme dei segni abbastanza standardizzate in tutta l'area occidentale dell'espansione fenicia, a cominciare da ca. il V secolo a. C. Alcune iscrizioni hanno forme di lettere molto accurate, evidentemente opera di buoni scribi professionisti, e trovano confronti abbastanza stringenti in una serie di documenti attribuiti al III sec. a. C. rinvenuti a Cartagine e in Sardegna. La maggior parte delle iscrizioni incise su ceramica mostra invece un tipo di grafia che appare come una schematizzazione caratteristica e specifica di Malta,⁵ a partire dalle forme puniche.

Un gruppo di iscrizioni molto frammentarie è dipinto, inciso e dipinto o soltanto inciso in maniera accurata su recipienti spesso di forma chiusa. Vi si trovano le espressioni "del santuario" (ŠHMQDŠ); "del sacerdote" (ŠKHN) o "del sacerdote di Astarte" (ŠKHN 'ŠTRT). Il termine KHN, = sacerdote (o l'abbreviazione verosimilmente equivalente, K) appare inciso anche su alcune lucerne o piattini di forma caratteristica, spesso accompagnato da un segno circolare simile alla lettera fenicia T. Questo segno è attestato anche nell'area vicino-orientale e a Cartagine. Il suo significato è stato discusso, ma in ogni caso il simbolo è stato considerato una sorta di marchio di controllo di un'autorità civica o religiosa.⁶ Nel contesto del santuario di Astarte si può proporre che il segno, da interpretare forse come l'abbreviazione del vocabolo THR (= puro), indichi la purità rituale dei recipienti.⁷

Altre serie di iscrizioni sono ancora in corso di schedatura e di studio. Per quanto riguarda la forma dei segni, già nei rapporti preliminari di scavo erano stati individuati brevi testi scritti nella cosiddetta varietà neopunica, un tipo di scrittura molto semplificata che si afferma in Occidente dopo la caduta di Cartagine. I testi sono spesso frammentari e difficili da interpretare. Nei prossimi soggiorni ci si dedicherà al loro studio e contemporaneamente alla schedatura delle restanti sigle individuate.

Le iscrizioni monumentali infine, nell'insieme ben interpretate, dovranno essere studiate più dettagliatamente per quanto riguarda lo sviluppo della scrittura ed eventualmente dei formulari.

M. G. A. G.

Reperti preistorici. È stata realizzata una banca-dati dei reperti di interesse preistorico, con documentazione grafica e fotografica dei reperti più significativi. Come è noto, l'impianto delle strutture successive ha in genere impedito la conservazione delle stratificazioni più antiche, ma l'insieme dei materiali rinvenuti, soprattutto ceramici, a partire almeno dalla fase di Tarxien è molto consistente. Questa situazione permetterà di condurre uno studio di carattere statistico sulle associazioni tra gli elementi costitutivi del patrimonio tipologico (ad esempio forme vascolari, decorazioni, elementi di presa) dei vari momenti, studio teso a comprendere il relativo grado di variabilità della produzione ceramica. La distribuzione spaziale dei reperti, sia quantitativa che, nei limiti consentiti dal carattere dei rinvenimenti effettuati, qualitativa da un punto di vista funzionale, può inoltre aiutare a comprendere l'uso differenziato dello spazio nelle diverse fasi, o almeno in quelle attestate in modo più rilevante (Tarxien, Borg-in-Nadur).

È stato inoltre impostato un programma di analisi archeometriche dei manufatti ceramici, volto in

particolare a definire il livello tecnologico della produzione e i fenomeni di continuità o frattura nelle modalità di realizzazione di tali manufatti nei diversi periodi preistorici. I risultati ottenuti potranno dare un contributo al dibattito più generale sulle persistenze locali e sugli influssi esterni negli sviluppi storici dell'Arcipelago maltese nel terzo e nel secondo millennio a.C.

Lo studio sistematico dei reperti da Tas-Silġ, effettuato tenendo conto anche dei risultati ottenuti dalle ricerche più o meno recenti condotte nelle isole maltesi e del problema dei rapporti con la Sicilia e, almeno per la fase della necropoli di Tarxien (l'ipotesi della presenza di ceramica micenea a Tas-Silġ non sembra essere confermata), con l'Egeo, può fornire un significativo apporto alla conoscenza dei processi culturali nel Mediterraneo centrale nei due millenni che precedono l'inserimento di Malta nelle rotte fenicie.

A. C.

Ceramica fenicia. La ceramica fenicia rinvenuta a Tas-Silġ riveste per qualità e quantità un potenziale informativo storico forse ineguagliato nell'ambito dei santuari del Vicino Oriente e del Mediterraneo.

Per quanto concerne la ceramica relativa alle fasi che si possono definire come fenicie (*orizzonti 3 – 5*, in parte *orizzonte 6*) è in corso di svolgimento un piano di studio che prevede la pubblicazione di una serie di monografie sulla cultura materiale (A. Ciasca e altri). I materiali vengono studiati e documentati in base alle caratteristiche specifiche delle singole classi di contenitori, organizzate in serie funzionali e tipologiche e accompagnate secondo necessità da schedature di singoli pezzi. Tabelle e indici forniranno inoltre ogni indicazione sui contesti di rinvenimento, distribuzione spaziale, quantificazioni, ecc. Accanto allo studio più strettamente archeologico e ceramologico, la ricerca coinvolge campi di interesse diversi, alla cui analisi andranno applicate le metodologie specifiche relative: forma di cultura, produzione, economia, religione, organizzazione sociale, ecc. Verrà ricercata la collaborazione quanto più ampia di studiosi delle varie specialità. La ceramica accompagna tutta la vita del santuario ed è elemento validissimo per definire caratteri e importanza dei singoli periodi della sua storia.

La totalità della ceramica delle fasi fenicie di Tas-Silġ è di produzione locale, mentre solo pochissimi singoli frammenti possono considerarsi importati. Questo dato di fatto si propone all'attenzione a vari livelli. Innanzitutto per le problematiche sul tipo di rapporto fra elemento indigeno maltese e i nuovi arrivati: il contatto diretto è evidente soprattutto in base alla tecnica dei manufatti. Da un punto di vista storico più ampio questa considerazione apre uno degli interrogativi

basilari sull'espansione dei Fenici: quello della provenienza e della composizione dei gruppi di asiatici che raggiungono l'arcipelago, i cosiddetti "coloni". Nelle aree mediterranee di espansione meglio note – Tunisia, Sicilia, Sardegna, Spagna, ecc. – la situazione non è molto diversa, dato che le importazioni dal Vicino Oriente sono rarissime, anche nella Penisola Iberica e a Cartagine, dove gli scavi intensivi e approfonditi degli ultimi decenni hanno portato al rinvenimento di rari frammenti di botteghe asiatiche. Una metodologia utile alla discussione e forse in futuro alla soluzione del problema storico sarà quella di ricostruire il repertorio ceramico documentato a Malta e metterlo a confronto con la situazione delle altre regioni, con i preliminari ma indispensabili controlli sulla effettiva corrispondenza cronologica di ciascun blocco di documentazione. In termini più generali, rispetto a quanto preliminarmente proposto negli anni Sessanta – quando ancora le facies più antiche di tutto il Mediterraneo fenicio erano praticamente ignote – accentuando l'impressione di una specificità di rapporti con il Vicino Oriente, sembra ora di potere collocare Malta su una linea non molto diversa da quella di altre regioni. Archeologicamente parlando, si può forse riconoscere una facies iniziale che presenta notevoli analogie in tutto il Mediterraneo centrale e occidentale, e che rivelerebbe analogie di rapporti con il Vicino Oriente. Questa fase precede le successive specializzazioni, caratterizzate da stili e repertori "regionali", sulla esistenza delle quali – anche se non da molto tempo – c'è ora una sostanziale convergenza di opinioni fra studiosi.

A Tas-Silġ, per quanto concerne l'impiego dei vasi in questa fase, è significativa la prevalenza (in pratica, la quasi totalità) di forme aperte soprattutto di piccole dimensioni – coppe, lucerne, piattelli – che rimanda a un uso specifico, forse "conviviale", di contenitori per uso singolo. Il fatto che nel VII sec. a.C. compaia con frequenza anche una forma di skyphos di imitazione dal repertorio greco, collega Malta alle altre regioni fenicie d'Occidente, nei cui siti archeologici questa è stata ormai ampiamente riconosciuta (BRIEZE & DOCTER 1992). L'assenza di grandi contenitori chiusi, anfore "da trasporto" o "da stoccaggio" sembra escludere per questo periodo intenti di "tesaurizzazione" di risorse alimentari nel santuario.

A partire da un momento che si può collocare preliminarmente nel VI sec. a.C. il volume della ceramica nel santuario raggiunge quantità notevolissime, con forme completamente diverse dalle precedenti. Ciò evidenzia da un lato l'importanza forse accresciuta del santuario e l'intensità della sua frequentazione – da parte della comunità locale ma probabilmente anche di quelle esterne – e dall'altra il rinnovarsi della sua organizzazione sia monumentale sia culturale ed economica. Inoltre è sempre attorno a quest'epoca che

la produzione ceramica maltese si indirizza verso un processo che condurrà alla formazione di una “facies” dell’Arcipelago ben diversa da quella delle regioni vicine, ad esempio Tunisia e Sicilia. In questa facies molto particolare, la produzione si specializza nella realizzazione di lunghe serie ceramiche, dove accanto a forme di produzione fenicia figurano imitazioni di forme dal repertorio greco e financo altre totalmente diverse, ad esempio alcune di possibile ispirazione egiziana, anche di materia diversa (pietra dura, alabastro, ecc.). Questa ricchissima serie di contenitori è sempre di produzione locale: indice senza dubbio di una organizzazione della produzione rigorosamente controllata (da parte della classe sacerdotale?).

A. CI.

Vasellame da fuoco. Lo studio sul vasellame da fuoco del santuario di Tas-Silġ ha preso in considerazione il vasellame utilizzato per la cottura del cibo: una classe di materiali generalmente trascurata nella letteratura archeologica, ma che riveste un potenziale informativo notevole.⁸ Nel caso specifico il materiale è ancora più significativo, dato che esso è in relazione con pratiche ed attività all’interno del santuario maltese che prevedevano verosimilmente pasti rituali; la presenza di iscrizioni a crudo con dedica ad Astarte su un certo numero di esemplari che presentano anche forti tracce d’uso conferma la sacralità di questo vasellame, la cui produzione sembra da collegare strettamente all’attività del santuario. La ricerca sul vasellame da fuoco quindi comprende sia un’analisi tipologica, attraverso un’adeguata classificazione morfologica e tecnologica, sia un’analisi funzionale sulla base dei più recenti approcci metodologici applicati soprattutto nell’ambito greco e romano.

Nell’ambito del Dottorato in Archeologia presso l’Università Cattolica di Milano, è stata inoltre avviata una ricerca su “I processi di trasformazione nel rito. Il caso del santuario di Tas-Silġ (Malta); analisi funzionale e spaziale di strutture e materiali”. Lo studio consiste in una revisione di materiali ceramici provenienti dai contesti più significativi dal punto di vista culturale (altari, vasche e bacini lustrali, scarichi). Si tratta di un’analisi in cui viene privilegiato l’aspetto funzionale, con l’identificazione delle forme più diffuse e del loro uso e con la loro quantificazione, in modo tale da ricostruire, per quanto possibile, le dinamiche di trasformazione o di continuità nel rito lungo tutto l’arco di frequentazione del santuario di età storica. Inoltre un preliminare studio tipologico del materiale permetterà di fornire dati ulteriori sui processi di formazione nei depositi archeologici dei contesti di provenienza e, anche sulla funzione (o sulle funzioni) di questi ultimi.

Q. A.

Le anfore dal periodo tardo-ellenistico al XII secolo. Lo studio dei contenitori da trasporto rinvenuti negli scavi di Tas-Silġ e S. Pawl Milqi si può dire ormai concluso.⁹ I numerosi frammenti schedati, pari a circa 10.000 esemplari, costituiscono un campione quantitativo più che valido per ricostruire le principali tendenze dell’economia e del commercio di Malta nell’arco di quasi 15 secoli, dall’età ellenistica fino al periodo normanno. Per la sua posizione al centro delle rotte marittime l’isola rappresenta un osservatorio privilegiato sui flussi commerciali mediterranei; le anfore segnalano le relazioni con i diversi centri produttori dell’Oriente e dell’Occidente, nonché il ruolo che Malta si trovò ad avere, nelle varie fasi storiche, nell’ambito dei traffici.

Particolarmente ricco di testimonianze si è rivelato il periodo tardo-repubblicano (fine II – I sec. a.C.), non a caso caratterizzato sia a Tas-Silġ sia a S. Pawl Milqi da fiorenti attività architettoniche: oltre ai cospicui rifornimenti alimentari dall’Italia e dal Nord-Africa, particolare interesse riveste l’individuazione di una produzione di anfore maltesi destinata al trasporto di prodotti locali (olio? garum?). Su tali contenitori è stata condotta anche un’indagine archeometrica, i cui risultati sono stati recentemente pubblicati.¹⁰

Le anfore di età bizantina di Tas-Silġ (VI - IX secolo) hanno rivelato un panorama nuovo e per certi aspetti inaspettato: la loro presenza conferma da un lato l’importanza del sito nella organizzazione territoriale dell’arcipelago maltese in un periodo cruciale della storia mediterranea, dall’altro il particolare ruolo di Malta nella organizzazione navale e commerciale del tema bizantino di Sicilia. Mentre la ricerca sui contenitori anforici restituiti dagli scavi confluiranno a breve i volumi monografici, una sintesi sui risultati storico-archeologici verrà data alle stampe entro il 2000.¹¹

B. B.

Negli ultimi anni sono state imposte ulteriori ricerche:

- lo studio degli elementi architettonici, curato da Maria Pia Rossignani e Furio Sacchi, al fine di giungere a delineare il volto del complesso nelle sue successive fasi e la qualificazione delle soluzioni adottate nell’ambito delle contemporanee realizzazioni architettoniche del Mediterraneo;
- la ricerca topografica nella regione di Tas-Silġ, guidata e coordinata da Enrico Giannichedda (Istituto di Storia della Cultura Materiale di Genova), che si pone l’obiettivo di definire l’estensione massima del santuario e dei suoi annessi nei diversi periodi storici; Nell’ambito delle ricerche archeometriche:
- verrà proseguito il programma di analisi mineropetrografiche avviato nel 1998 e finalizzato alla ricostruzione dell’ambiente produttivo e delle caratteristiche delle diverse classi ceramiche fabbricate

nell'arcipelago maltese dall'età fenicia all'età medievale (vd. *supra*, anfore); il coordinamento è affidato a Claudio Capelli (Università degli Studi di Genova);

- verranno avviate a partire dal novembre 2000 la ricerca osteologica, affidata a Silvia Di Martino (Laboratorio di Archeobiologia dei Civici Musei di Como), e quella paleobotanica, da parte di Girolamo Fiorentino (Università degli Studi di Lecce).

II. SAN PAWL MILQI

1. Cenni storici e storia delle indagini

Il complesso archeologico di St. Pawl Milqi è situato nella zona nord-orientale dell'isola, a mezza costa della collina che domina l'attuale centro agricolo di Bur-Marrad e la piana sino alle insenature di Salina e San Paolo. Le indagini, condotte dalla Missione Archeologica Italiana tra il 1963 e il 1968, hanno riportato alla luce una vasta porzione di una villa-fattoria, parzialmente risparmiata dalle opere di terrazzamento legate al continuato sfruttamento agricolo dell'area: fra quelle censite nel corso degli ultimi trent'anni su tutto il territorio maltese, essa rappresenta l'unica indagata in modo esaustivo. Il rinvenimento di una sepoltura dell'età neolitica (fase di Zebbug) e di frammenti ceramici dell'età del Bronzo (Borg-in-Nadur) attestano che l'area fu oggetto di frequentazione in età preistorica e protostorica. Più consistenti sono le evidenze relative a un complesso a carattere residenziale, cui doveva verosimilmente affiancarsi una parte a destinazione rustica, che intorno alla fine del II sec. a. C. si sovrappone a installazioni di età fenicio-punica, collegate forse ad attività produttive di incerta definizione. Il rinvenimento di frantoi e di piattaforme per la spremitura delle olive, come pure di vasche per la decantazione dell'olio, documentano la vocazione agricola dell'impianto, prevalentemente indirizzato alla coltivazione dell'ulivo e alla lavorazione dei suoi prodotti. Caratterizza inoltre il complesso la struttura riconducibile a una potente fortificazione, che si articola in un doppio muro terminante - almeno su un angolo - con una muratura curvilinea con opera a scarpa, verosimilmente una torre circolare.

Nell'ambito dell'archeologia maltese la fama dello scavo è legata soprattutto alla connessione che la tradizione ha instaurato da tempi remoti tra il sito e la vicenda di San Paolo, naufrago a Malta. Si legge infatti negli Atti degli Apostoli (*Act. XVII-XXVIII*) che Paolo, fatto naufrago sulle coste dell'isola, venne accolto e ospitato da Publio, personaggio eminente maltese e proprietario terriero, in uno dei suoi poderi: la diffusione del cristianesimo nell'arcipelago viene tradizionalmente fatta iniziare in questo momento. Segnale evidente del collegamento fra il sito della villa e il soggiorno maltese dell'Apostolo è la piccola cappella secentesca dedicata a St. Pawl Milqi (vale a dire "colui che è stato incontrato"), che le indagini archeologiche hanno

dimostrato impostarsi su una precedente chiesa del XV secolo.¹² Sotto quest'ultima, è stata messa in luce una struttura curvilinea interpretata dagli scavatori come il resto di un edificio di culto cristiano di età medievale: essa insiste sugli ambienti della villa tardo-imperiale, e in particolare su un vano dotato di pozzo, che suggestivamente venne messo in relazione con il rito del battesimo e la cristianizzazione dell'isola legata alla presenza di Paolo.

I risultati delle indagini trovarono una prima regolare edizione nei rendiconti di scavo (*MM 1963-1968*); il volume di M. Cagiano de Azevedo *Testimonianze archeologiche della tradizione paolina a Malta*, Roma 1966 costituì poi un primo approfondimento su questo particolare aspetto.

2. La ricerca attuale

Dopo oltre un trentennio di sosta, il giugno 2000 ha visto la ripresa dei lavori a S.Pawl Milqi, nell'ambito delle attività della rinnovata Missione Archeologica Italiana.

L'iniziativa, progettata in stretta collaborazione con i funzionari del Museums Department of Malta, si è svolta sotto la direzione scientifica della prof. Maria Pia Rossignani, direttore della Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia dell'Università Cattolica di Milano, e che a San Paolo aveva lavorato all'inizio della propria carriera accademica.

Lo scopo ultimo è la definitiva edizione dello scavo nel giro di breve tempo: in vista di questo obiettivo sono stati previsti l'analisi delle evidenze strutturali e limitati saggi per controlli stratigrafici, affiancati dallo studio del materiale raccolto nel corso degli scavi degli anni Sessanta. Le rinnovate metodologie di intervento prevedono inoltre l'ausilio di strumenti informatici destinati inizialmente a costituire un rapido strumento di lavoro, ma in ultima analisi a fornire una base utile alla creazione di prodotti multimediali per la divulgazione dei risultati delle indagini e alla musealizzazione dell'area archeologica.

La campagna condotta a cavallo tra giugno e luglio del 2000 ha visto la partecipazione di collaboratori dell'Istituto di Archeologia dell'Università Cattolica di Milano, insieme a studenti della Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia dello stesso Ateneo.¹³

Un intervento approfondito di pulizia dei resti archeologici, reso possibile anche dal preventivo diserbo dell'area predisposto dal Museums Department, ha condotto a mettere in luce le strutture della villa, in vista di un'adeguata rilettura delle caratteristiche delle stesse e di una corretta ricostruzione delle sequenze costruttive. Questo primo intervento ha permesso di condurre una serie di osservazioni sulla complessità delle vicende

edilizie che si sono succedute nel sito, e che hanno modificato a più riprese l'assetto architettonico della villa.

Le operazioni di pulizia hanno permesso inoltre di porre in evidenza i fenomeni di degrado delle murature, esposte nel trentennio trascorso dalla loro scoperta all'azione distruttiva degli agenti atmosferici: ciò ha condotto anche a un preventivo censimento delle zone da sottoporre al più presto a interventi di conservazione.

Il progetto di restauro e valorizzazione del sito è stato formulato da funzionari dell'Istituto Centrale per il Restauro.

D. L.

Summary in English

The Italian Archaeological Mission, which has been active in Malta since 1963, has been involved in archaeological digs in three different sites: Tas-Silġ, San Pawl Milqi and Ras il-Wardiġa in Gozo. The importance of these sites, particularly Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi, has led to the development of a new project. One of the aims of this project is to follow up on the archaeological research in the light of the initial results obtained bearing in mind the latest developments in the study of the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean basin. A second aim is to develop a holistic management plan, in collaboration with Italian universities (Università di Roma "La Sapienza"; Università Cattolica di Milano; Università degli Studi di Lecce) and the Museums Department of Malta, to evaluate these sites of great archaeological interest using methodologies and techniques tried and tested in Italy.

In 1996, the excavations at Tas-Silġ were reopened. This large Phoenician sanctuary which dominated the East-West route, was used (from the 8th cent. B.C.) by semitic peoples who practiced their rituals in the ancient megalithic temple constructions of the Tarxien phase. An analysis was made of the central part of the sanctuary, characterized by a complex stratification starting from the neolithic period up until the Byzantine era but, unfortunately, ruined by repeated depredations from the time of the Knights up to the present day. There is, however, a 'stratigraphic island' conserved under the hellenistic pavement level which seems intact and still to be excavated. This area, however, has already shown evidence of Phoenician type ceramics known as 'red-slip' in association with a fragment of protocorinthian type imported pottery (area VIII). With regard to the reconstruction of the sanctuary in the late Phoenician development, an interesting feature was detected in the courtyard in front of the temple façade. It consists of an extensive floor made from beaten limestone chippings which bears the imprint of a number of small raised elements (areas VI, VII). An exceptional find were two

deposits within a small cultic chapel at the centre of the courtyard (area I), containing small ceramic cups of local production (V cent. B.C.). The courtyard was tiled at the end of the II/ beginning of the I cent. B.C. and was closed in on four sides by a portico with two naves on the north and south sides and a paving in 'opus signino' with regular rows of small white marble tesserae. The colonnade of the portico had doric order pillars on three sides while on the fourth side, in front of the temple façade, a kind of fifth colonnade was built with capitals in the corinthian order. The late hellenistic courtyard conserves the oldest cultic chapel, which might have undergone later changes. However, always within the hellenistic building tradition. By this time the islands were under Roman domination and the origin of this grandiose intervention most probably resides in the patronage of Italic merchants. They were attracted by the economic potential of the island to control the Mediterranean routes proof of which is the great number of amphoras of Italic importation. From the same period, it has been possible to date the most recent 'temenos' which was fortified by at least one tower, and which cuts through a number of earlier altars at the northern edge of the sanctuary, (area X). Other investigations have produced new data concerning the water management system of the sanctuary (area V), and about the stratigraphy between the VIIIth and the I centuries B.C. (area VIII).

The prehistoric temple spaces must have been in use - with modifications and other interventions - for the whole duration of use of this cult area. The start of excavations in this area has led to the discovery of a large group of coins, which were found within the rectangular pit formally identified as a baptismal font (area IX). Among the 275 coins in bronze and silver, which are currently being cleaned and restored, there is one in gold: a tremisse of Constantine IV, coined at the mint of Syracuse between 670 and 674 A.D.

At San Pawl Milqi, the reopening of the excavations was aimed at a definitive and rapid publication of the excavation results. In view of this objective, it was planned to analyse the structural remains and make controlled stratigraphic interventions. Together with these approaches, a study of the material excavated in the Nineteen Sixties will also be carried out. In June 2000 an extensive cleaning operation brought to light the structures of the villa which would enable a revisiting of the conclusions reached in regard to these structures including their chronological development. The cleaning operation has also indicated the deterioration of the walls which has led to a reappraisal of those areas most in need of restoration and consolidation, which works are to be undertaken by the *Istituto Centrale per il Restauro* of Rome.

NOTE

* Vogliamo segnalare che, anche nel caso in cui ciò non sia esplicitamente indicato, il testo è stato redatto con la collaborazione dei diversi studiosi partecipanti alla Missione. *Università di Roma-La Sapienza*: prof.ri Maria Giulia Amadasi Guzzo (M.G. A. G.), Alberto Cazzella (A. C.), Antonia Ciasca (A. CI.), dott.ri Bice Pugliese, Maria Pamela Toti, Fiorella Scagliarini e Maurizio Necci per le fotografie; *Università Cattolica di Milano*: prof. Maria Pia Rossignani, dott.ri. Filippo Airoidi (F. A.), Chiara Bergamaschi, Chiara Bonetti (C. B.), Aldo Borlenghi, Brunella Bruno (B. B., ora funzionario della Soprintendenza ai Beni Archeologici del Veneto), Davide Locatelli (D. L.), Annalisa Maiorano, Annamaria Paternoster, Anna Maria Rossi, Fulvia Rossi, Furio Sacchi e Remo Rachini, Antonello Ruggieri per le opere di rilevamento; *Università degli Studi di Lecce*: prof. Grazia Semeraro (G. S.), dott.ri Gabriella Bustini, Carlo De Mitri, Fabrizio Ghio, Barbara Pecere, Alessandro Quercia (A. Q.).

¹ Per un confronto generico delle coppette : M.P. ROSSIGNANI, *Ceramica e trovamenti vari*, in *MM 1969*, pp. 52-53, fig. 10, nn. 4-8.

² A conferma si cita il canone 48 del Concilio di Elvira (fine del III o anni iniziali del IV secolo), in cui viene espressamente detto: “emendare placuit, ut qui baptizantur (ut fieri solebant) nummos in concham non immittant” (*Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, a c. di G. D. MANSI, Firenze 1759-1798, II, c.13). La notizia dell’usanza, evidentemente diffusa e che si tenta di contrastare, di gettare monete nella vasca al momento del rito conferma l’identificazione della struttura con un battistero. Si ringrazia per la segnalazione il prof. Marco Sannazaro.

³ Presentazione d’insieme, con trattazione più specifica di alcune classi di iscrizioni, in M.G. AMADASI GUZZO, *Quelques tessons inscrits du sanctuaire d’Astarté à Tas-Silg*, in *Atti del IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi fenici e punico* (Cadice 1998), in stampa.

⁴ Sul dio cfr. *Dictionnaire de la civilisation phénicienne et punique*, Turnhout 1992, p. 293, s. v. Milkashart.

⁵ Si veda la tavola preliminare dei segni in G. GARBINI, *Le iscrizioni puniche*, in *MM 1964*, p. 82.

⁶ Le varie proposte sono presentate da J. RENZ, *Die Althebräische Inschriften*, I, Darmstadt 1995, p. 214, nota 3; v. inoltre Y. YADIN, *The Excavations of Masada. The Documents and Inscriptions: 3. Ostraca and Inscriptions on Pottery Vessels*, in “Israel Exploration Journal” 15, 1965, pp. 111-112.

⁷ Sul vocabolo cfr. I. ZATELLI, *Il campo lessicale degli aggettivi di purità in ebraico biblico*, Quaderni di semitistica 7, Firenze 1978, pp. 37-42; 89-100. Vasi puri, cioè destinati ad un uso culturale, sono citati in Is. 66, 20. Cfr. anche *DISI*, p. 420, s.v.

⁸ La ricerca è stata oggetto di una tesi di diploma discussa

presso la Scuola di Specializzazione in Archeologia dell’Università di Lecce nel maggio del 1998, dal titolo *La ceramica da fuoco del santuario di Tas Silg (Malta)* ed è stata resa possibile anche grazie a una borsa di studio del Ministero degli Affari Esteri. Sulla ricerca, di prossima pubblicazione, si veda il contributo preliminare *La ceramica da fuoco del santuario di Tas Silg (Malta); tipi attestati e proposte interpretative* nell’opera in onore di Antonia Ciasca in corso di pubblicazione e *Pasti rituali nella Malta punica: il vasellame da fuoco nei contesti sacri e funerari* in questo stesso fascicolo.

⁹ La ricerca è stata condotta nell’ambito del dottorato presso l’Università di Pisa: B. BRUNO, *Economia a Malta in età romana e bizantina. Le anfore degli scavi della Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta*, tesi di dottorato, Pisa 1999

¹⁰ B. BRUNO, C. CAPELLI, *Nuovi tipi di anfore da trasporto a Malta*, in *Le scienze della terra e l’archeometria* (6° Giornata, Este 1998), Este 2000, pp. 59-65.

¹¹ B. BRUNO, *Malta in età romana e bizantina. Economia di un arcipelago al centro del Mediterraneo*, Bari (Edipuglia), in stampa.

¹² L’edificio quattrocentesco è noto – con diversa dedizione – anche da fonti letterarie, per la cui trattazione si rimanda al contributo di V. BONELLO, *Tradizioni e documenti storici*, in *MM 1963*, pp. 119-121.

¹³ Hanno partecipato ai lavori i dott.ri Filippo Airoidi, Chiara Bergamaschi, Chiara Bonetti, Aldo Borlenghi, Claudio Cortese e Fulvia Rossi, coordinati dal dott. Davide Locatelli. Si coglie l’occasione per ringraziare anche il sig. Daniel Puchalka, che ha collaborato attivamente e con interesse alle operazioni di preparazione del sito.

ABBREVIAZIONI

BORG 1963 = V.V. BORG, *Tradizioni e documenti storici*, in *MM 1963*, pp. 41-51

BRIESE & DOCTER 1992 = C. BRIESE, R. DOCTER, *Der Phönizische Skyphos: Adaption einer griechischen Trinkschale*, in “Madriider Mitteilungen” 33, 1992, pp. 25-69

CIASCA 1976-77 = A. CIASCA, *Il tempio fenicio di Tas-Silg. Una proposta di ricostruzione*, in “Kokalos” 22-23, 1976-77, pp. 162-172

CIASCA 1993 = A. CIASCA, *Some Considerations Regarding the Sacrificial Precincts at Tas-Silg*, in “Journal of Mediterranean Studies” 3, 1993, pp. 225-243

CIASCA 1999 = A. CIASCA, *Le isole maltesi e il Mediterraneo fenicio*, in “Malta Archaeological Review” 3, 1999, pp. 24-33

COLEIRO 1963 = E. COLEIRO, *Malta nelle letterature classiche*, in *MM 1963*, pp. 25-38

DISI = J. HOFTIJZER – K. JONGELING, *Dictionnaire of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*, Leiden – New York – Koln 1995

DOC = PH. GRIERSON, *Catalogue of the Bizantyne Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Wittemore Collection*, II/2, Washington 1993

FRENO 1996 = V.A.J. FRENO, *What do the letters TT at Tas-Silġ, Malta mean ?*, in *Alle soglie della classicità. Il Mediterraneo tra tradizione e innovazione, Studi in onore di Sabatino Moscati*, Pisa – Roma 1996, III, pp. 1127 – 1134

GROTTANELLI 1982 = C. GROTTANELLI, *Astarte Matuta e Tinnit Fortuna*, in “Vicino Oriente” 5, 1982, pp.105-108

MM 1963 – 1970 = M. CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO, A. CIASCA ET AL., *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta. Rapporto preliminare della campagna di scavo 1963; 1964; 1965; 1966; 1967; 1968; 1969; 1970*, Roma 1964 - 1973

